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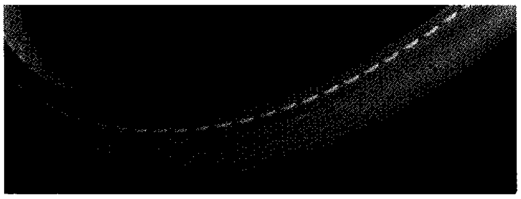

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THE NEW YORKER

NOVEMBER 30, 2009

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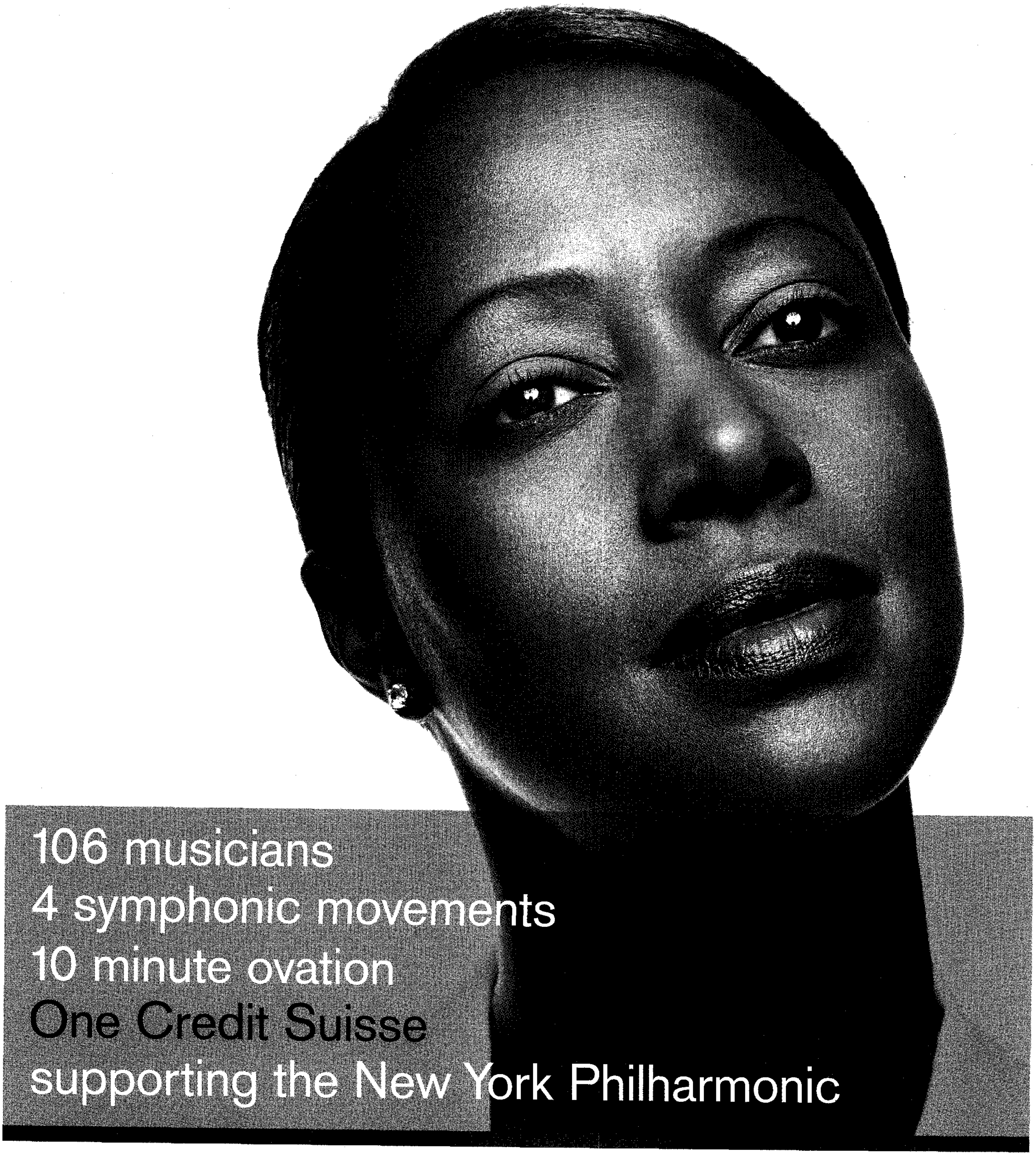
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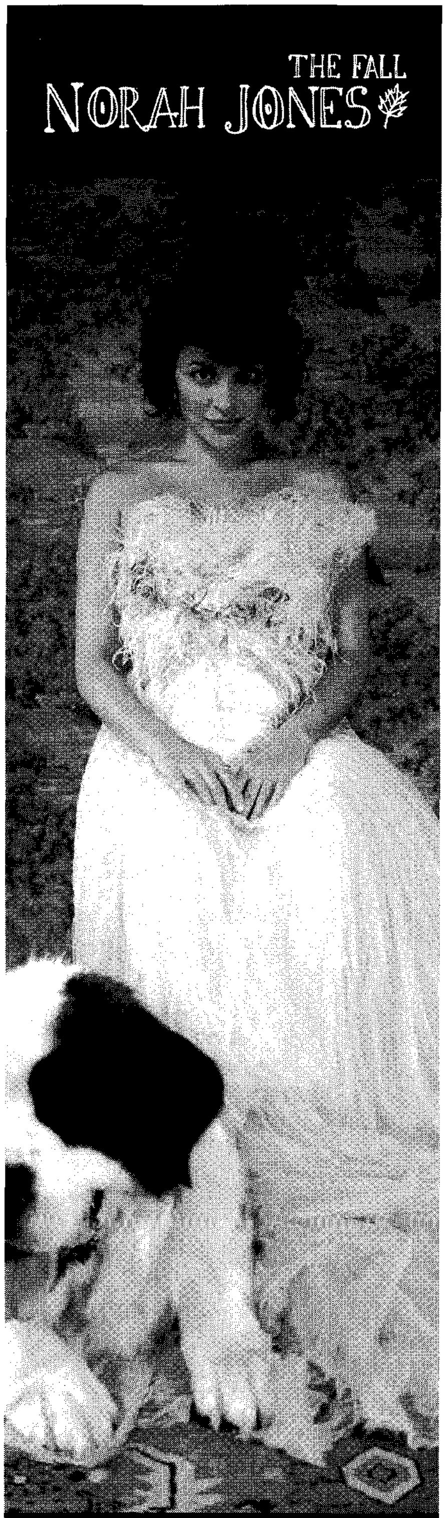

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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
Ariel Levy talks with *Blake Eskin* on The New Yorker Out Loud, and chats live with readers about sports and gender. / *Jerome Groopman* and *Ryan Lizza* discuss health care with *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Political Scene. / Multimedia: *Dana Goodyear* on Francesco Vezzoli, with photographs by *Brigitte Lacombe.* / Video: A new Finger Painting by *Jorge Colombo;* the DVD of the Week. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* on politics, *John Cassidy* on the economy, the Cartoon Lounge on Thanksgiving, and more. / The Cartoon Kit, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

CONSCIOUS CARNIVORES

I read Elizabeth Kolbert's review of Jonathan Safran Foer's "Eating Animals" in a slaughterhouse parking lot, while awaiting the hides of ten sheep that I had just delivered to their deaths (Books, November 9th). I am an ecologist and spent six years as a vegan animal-rights activist, and so I may be in a unique position to respond to the book. Vegetarianism (and veganism) is a respectable personal choice, but it is not the moral high ground that many of its adherents would have us believe. First, environmental degradation and cruelty to sentient beings are not unique to industrial animal agriculture; rather, they are characteristics of industrial agriculture as a whole. I wonder if Foer has ever visited, or considered the impact of, a thousand-acre soybean monoculture. We have demanded cheap food, and so we have received cheap, destructive food production. Second, vegetarian moralism denies an essential fact of living: death. Everything dies, and not always in its due time. The deaths of those ten sheep, all individuals to me, weigh heavy and will not fade. And yet to be so intimate with the great other is enriching beyond description. In the end, this is what worries me most about Foer's arguments—that so many are so ignorant of their food choices, so ignorant of agriculture, and, finally, so ignorant of what awaits us all.
Kevin Jablonski
Hamilton, N.Y.

Whether it's Foer or the philosopher Peter Singer who is advocating it, ethical vegetarianism is not going to have much of an impact on factory farming, because most people are still going to choose to eat meat. I would argue that Michael Pollan's approach of buying meat from non-factory farms is something that at least has a chance of changing the way that animals are raised. If there isn't enough traditionally raised, grass-fed meat to feed everybody in this country, that may be because people tend to eat more meat than they really need, too much farmland is being used to grow industrial corn, and the difficult rules set up by the U.S.D.A. for small farmers make alternative meat-raising more expensive than it ought to be.
Patience Hutchinson
San Francisco, Calif.

The proponents of vegetarianism advance arguments that are reflective of the detachment from nature that seems to have overtaken America—and, indeed, most of the world. There is only one good reason not to eat meat: because you don't like it. If vegetarians think they consume less by eating lower on the food chain, they should keep in mind that humans, whether they eat meat or not, use the vast majority of the earth's resources. Their most effective contribution to global well-being would be to simply not exist. Is it better for aging animals to suffer, blind, arthritic, starving, or cancerous, until merciful death? I grew up on a farm and can say with certainty that our animals gave their bodies in gratitude for a well-cared-for life.
Paul M. Gahlinger
Salt Lake City, Utah

The eating of meat may, of course, go back to ancient times, but so does guilt about an animal's being eaten, guilt that once gave rise to all sorts of rituals before the slaughter. We've lost those ritualistic apologies, but we're beginning to regain an awareness of and a sense of responsibility for the animal, which means that Foer's call for mindfulness is not so postmodern after all. Once people are informed about standard processing conditions, the polarizing arguments about local food and free-range meat versus vegetarianism demand that we each find a place somewhere on the continuum.
Leah Lax
Houston, Texas

•

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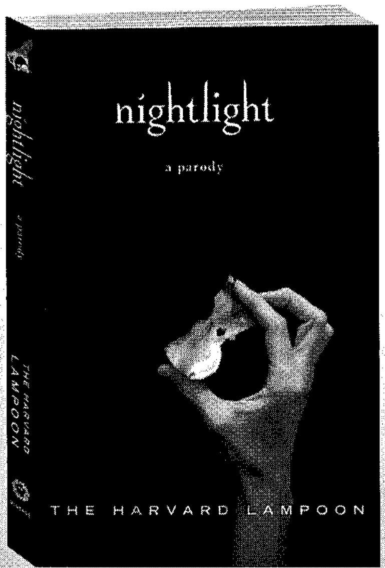
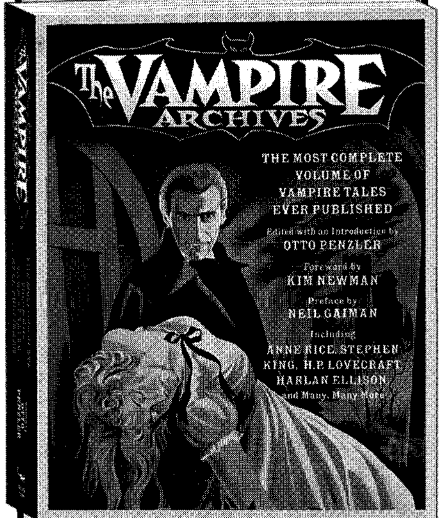
BOOKS THAT BITE!



The Harvard Lampoon's twisted parody
"Worth every pseudo-bloodsucking, angst-ridden page!"—*Entertainment Weekly*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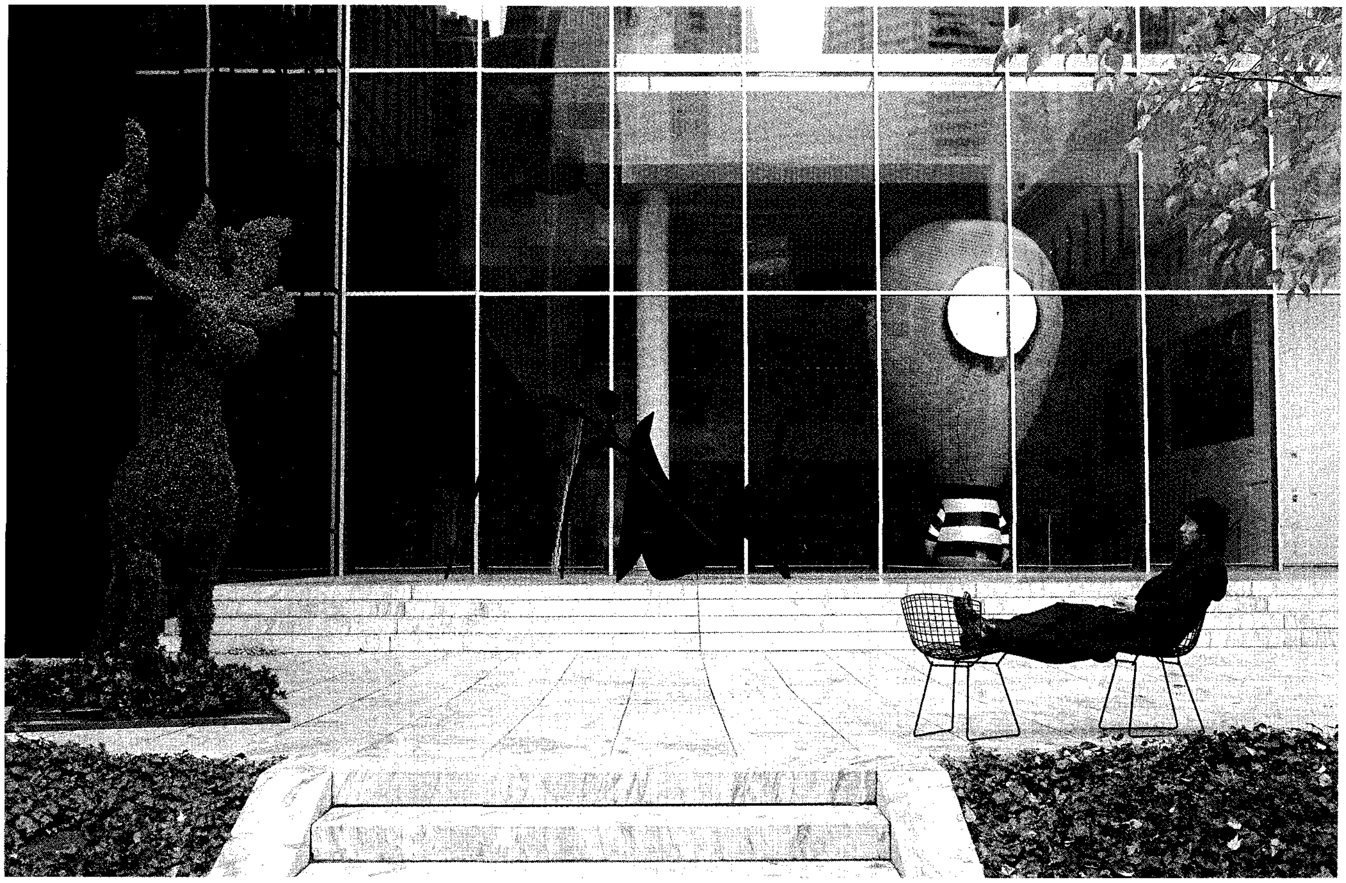

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
CARTE BLANCHE

Cate Blanchett, who, with her husband, Andrew Upton, took over as co-director of the Sydney Theatre Company last year, stars in the company's revival of Tennessee Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire." Liv Ullmann directs, at BAM. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
HOME FIELD

The local act Elysian Fields—primarily the singer Jennifer Charles and the ex-Lounge Lizard and multi-instrumentalist Oren Bloedow—are old hands at downtown pop. They drop in at Joe's Pub to celebrate the U.S. release of "The Afterlife," a moody set of songs that came out earlier this year in France, where they enjoy a wide following. (See page 12.)

ART
GREEK REVIVAL

The phantasmagoric paintings of Domenikos Theotokopoulos, better known as El Greco, entwined Byzantine and Renaissance influences. "The Origins of El Greco: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete," at the Onassis Cultural Center, exhibits several works by the Master—including one canvas from his storied late years in Spain—alongside related fifteenth- and sixteenth-century works. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
NICK OF TIME

To the relief of music lovers everywhere, Nick Eanet, a former concertmaster of the Met Orchestra, has taken up the first violin position with the Juilliard String Quartet after a delay caused by a hand injury. The group offers music by Schubert, Bartók, and Beethoven in a concert at the Juilliard School. (See page 17.)

MOVIES
SERF AND TURF

Anton Chekhov's stories and plays have inspired many movies, nowhere more than in his native Russia. Film Society of Lincoln Center presents seven Chekhov adaptations, from a 1960 version of "The Lady with the Dog" through "Ward No. 6," Russia's nominee for this year's foreign-language-film Oscar. (See page 19.)

"Tim Burton," at MOMA. *Photograph by Susanna Howe.*

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HOLIDAY EVENTS

"RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR"
This show has it all: high-kicking Rockettes, dancing toys, a live orchestra, ice skaters, 3-D visuals, fireworks, and even a donkey or two for the final scene, the climactic "Living Nativity," a feature of the very first Spectacular back in 1933. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-307-1000. Through Dec. 30.)

"THE NUTCRACKER"
How many dance careers begin with a performance of "The Nutcracker"? New York City Ballet provides ample opportunities to catch younger dancers débuting in Balanchine's 1954 version, in one of many featured roles: Arabian Coffee, Hot Chocolate, Candy Cane, and, of course, the shimmering Dewdrop, second only to the Sugarplum Fairy. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Nov. 27-Jan. 3.) ♦ The Urban Ballet Theatre's "Nutcracker in the Lower," now in its ninth season, moves the action to a Lower East Side housing project. Petipa and Tchaikovsky are liberally sprinkled with salsa, flamenco, and hip-hop. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 28-Dec. 5.) ♦ Valentina Kozlova, a former Bolshoi ballerina, presents her yearly gender-bending "Nutcracker," in which Clara's doll-making godfather, Herr Drosselmeyer (Margo Sappington), becomes a magic-trick-playing auntie. Charmingly, some of the boys' roles are also played by girls, not for artistic reasons but for want of male pupils. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 5 at 4 and 8.) ♦ Since 1995, Dances Patrelle has offered its "Yorkville Nutcracker," created by Francis Patrelle, which is set in New York, circa 1895; the action begins at Gracie Mansion and moves on to Central Park and the Bronx Botanical Garden. Chalnessa Eames and Jonathan Porretta, guest dancers from Pacific Northwest Ballet, perform the roles of the Sugarplum and her Cavalier. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-7933. Dec. 10-13.) ♦ New York Theatre Ballet's tasteful and quick version—only an hour long!—celebrates its twenty-fifth season. This dainty miniature is perfect for members of the under-ten set and their tired parents, with clever stage designs, pretty costumes by Sylvia Taalsohn Nolan, and a genial master of ceremonies. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Dec. 12-20.) ♦ The students at the Joffrey Ballet School, aged seven to twenty, put on a traditional "Nutcracker," newly created for them by the school's associate director, Davis Robertson. (Skirball Center, 566 La Guardia Pl. 212-352-3101. Dec. 18-20.)

TREES
Two nineteen-foot pine-bough barosaurs greet visitors at the main entrance to the American Museum of Natural History; inside, an alphabet-themed holiday tree is festooned with origami ornaments. (Central Park West, at 79th St. 212-769-5100. Through Jan. 3.) ♦ The Met decks out its Medieval Sculpture Hall with a candlelit, angel-adorned spruce tree and its perennially popular Baroque Nativity scene. (Fifth Ave., at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Through Jan. 6.) ♦ Rockefeller Center's illustrious behemoth is illuminated in classic style on Dec. 2. It will be set aglow near the end of a star-studded ceremony featuring the likes of Michael Buble, Aretha Franklin, Alicia Keys, Barry Manilow, the Roots, and Shakira, which runs from 7 to 9. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St. Through Jan. 7.)

MERRY LITERARY
The Morgan Library and Museum exhibits the original manuscript of Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," which was written in six short weeks late in 1843, in time for holiday publication. (225 Madison Ave., at 37th St. 212-685-0008. Through Jan. 10.) Dickens's personal copy of "A Christmas Carol" is on view in the main reading room of the New York Public Library, in "A Literary Christmas Miscellany from the Berg Collection." Included in the display are Christmas greetings from James Joyce, E. E. Cummings, and Jack Kerouac, among others. (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-869-8089. Dec. 4-Jan. 3.)

HANUKKAH
The Festival of Lights begins this year on Dec. 11. That afternoon, at about 3:40, the first lamp will be lit atop the thirty-two-foot-tall menorah on Fifth Ave. at 59th St. A light will be added each night at 5:30 through Dec. 19, except for Friday and Saturday, when the lighting takes place at 3:40 and 8:30, respectively. Note: On the evening of Dec. 13, there will also be live music, dancing, and hot latkes. (For more information, call 718-778-6000.) ♦ The Hasidic reggae performer Matisyahu marks the holiday with an eight-night stand. It starts on Dec. 10 at Webster Hall (125 E. 11th St.) and continues there Dec. 12-14. He's then at the Music Hall of Williamsburg (66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn) Dec. 16-17 and Dec. 19-20. It's the fourth year he's celebrated this way, and each night, as is his custom, he's joined by a guest. This year, they are, in the order of their appearance, Glitch Mob, John Brown's Body, Dub Trio, Brothers Past, Rana, Kid Koala, Travis McCoy, and Kevin Devine.

"HOLIDAY TRAIN SHOW"
The New York Botanical Garden's annual tribute to the romance of the season and the rails features model engines and cars chugging their way around the conservatory's replicas of more than a hundred New York City landmarks, all constructed from twigs, berries, leaves, seeds, and the like. Miniature versions of Ellis Island, the George Washington Bridge, and the original Yankee Stadium (1923) are featured, and the newest addition promises to be spectacular. The Beaux-Arts masterpiece Pennsylvania Station, which was felled by wreckers' balls in 1964, rises again, with honeysuckle, sea-grape leaves, peppercorns, viburnum, willow, and oak bark replacing the original's steel and stone. (Nov. 21-Jan. 10. Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx. www.nybg.org.)

"JUSTIN BOND'S CHRISTMAS SPELLS"
Having put aside the wig that helped transform him into the decrepit lounge singer Kiki, of Kiki and Herb, Bond soldiers on as a performance artist of the highest calibre. In "Christmas Spells," he's Huckleberry Finn—a Huckleberry Finn who works in a New Orleans whorehouse as one Sassy Sarah. The Christmas festivities at the brothel occasion original songs and dances in the English panto tradition, filtered through Bond's punk-drag sensibilities. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Dec. 9-12 at 8.)

"PETER & THE WOLF"
"Works & Process," at the Guggenheim, has created its own holiday tradition, a yearly presentation of the Prokofiev musical short story about a clever but overconfident boy, which also serves as a charming introduction to the instruments of the orchestra. Isaac Mizrahi, a savvy raconteur, recites; the Juilliard ensemble plays the glorious score; and each year a different artist is commissioned to design the show. This year's set is an installation of sculptures, created by the New Orleans-based art collective YA/YA. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Dec. 10-14.)

DOUG ELKINS & FRIENDS/DAVID PARKER AND THE BANG GROUP
Dance Theatre Workshop gets into the holiday game, tending the flame of two downtown traditions. "Fräulein Maria," Doug Elkins's off-kilter take on "The Sound of Music," is delightful and ingenious, good enough that you might want to see it every December. For weekend matinées, David Parker, who shines as Liesl in "Maria," revives his satirical and less pithy "Nut/Cracked." (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. "Fräulein Maria": Dec. 10-12 and Dec. 17-19. "Nut/Cracked": Dec. 13 and Dec. 19-20.)

"TAPPY HOLIDAYS!"
Ayodele Casel and Sarah Savelli, two expert and enterprising hoofers, move their tapfest into WNYC's Greene Space. Now in its fourth year, the event has evolved into a family affair, in which professional whizzes such as Jason Janas alternate with aspiring youth groups from across the country. (44 Charlton St. 646-725-1217. Dec. 12 at 8.)

WINTER SOLSTICE
Paul Winter brings his Consort to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. He'll be joined by Russia's Dmitri Pokrovsky Ensemble and New York's Forces of Nature Dance Theatre. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 17-19.)

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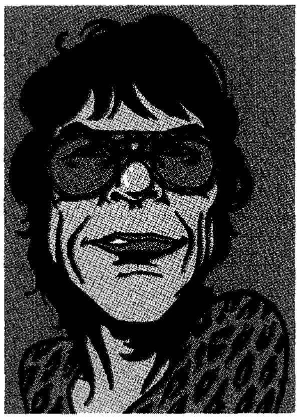
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LIVING DOLL

David Johansen is best known as the lead singer and principal songwriter of the New York Dolls, the early-seventies punk pioneers, who have reunited recently for both albums and tours. When he's with the Dolls, Johansen plays mostly fast and loud, but in the course of his career he's gone in for other shades and hues: he's been a New Wave troubadour (on his late-seventies and early-eighties solo albums), an immensely popular novelty night-club act (as the Ricky Ricardo-cum-Wynonie Harris alter ego Buster Poindexter), and a country-blues excavator (with the Harry Smiths), not to mention an actor and painter of some repute. In a rare solo show at the Highline Ballroom on Nov. 28, Johansen will move through all his musical personae with a band anchored by the guitarist Brian Koonin and the drummer Denny McDermitt—both longtime collaborators—and a set list that will include solo material (yell for "Marquesa de Sade"), archival doo-wop songs, and even some slower Dolls songs that don't usually get an airing, like the beautifully bleak ballad "Maimed Happiness."



—Ben Greenman

HOLIDAY MUSIC—CLASSICAL

"MESSIAH"
There is hardly a more traditional way to experience the glories of George Frideric Handel's "entertainment" on Christian themes than to hear the work performed by the St. Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, the best Anglican choir in the country. The group remains distinctive under the leadership of John Scott, who conducts two performances, accompanied by the Baroque group Concert Royal. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. www.saintthomaschurch.org. Dec. 8 and Dec. 10 at 7:30.) ♦ A strong alternative "Messiah" has long been provided by another professional-grade chorus, Musica Sacra, which performs in a lean and elegant style under the leadership of Kent Tritle. The impressive lineup of soloists includes the soprano Julianne Baird and the tenor William Ferguson. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 21-22 at 8.) ♦ Tritle also conducts a fine avocational group, the Oratorio Society of New York, in a single Carnegie Hall concert; the soloists include the soprano Susanna Phillips and the tenor Paul Appleby. (212-247-7800. Dec. 14 at 8.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
For several years now, the orchestra has been offering a worthy "Messiah" of its own; this year's will be led by the eminent German chorus master Helmuth Rilling, bringing his superbly disciplined Gächinger Kantorei Stuttgart. The soloists include the countertenor Daniel Taylor and the bass Shenyang. (Dec. 15-19 at 7:30.) ♦ The Philharmonic begins the season with "Holiday Brass," an afternoon of festive music offered by the orchestra's Principal Brass Quintet and the West Point Band Brass & Percussion ensemble. (Dec. 13 at 3.) ♦ Thomas Hampson is the special guest for the orchestra's New Year's Eve concert, a program featuring Gershwin's "American in Paris," Copland's "Appalachian Spring" Suite and selections from the "Old American Songs," and a cache of Broadway tunes. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

"THE NATIVITY TRIPTYCH"
The city is flush with "Messiah"s this year. The first of three holiday classical programs at Carnegie Hall offers a performance of the work by the renowned Les Violons du Roy ensemble (with the choir La Chapelle de Québec), conducted by the lyrically inspired Bernard Labadie, with the countertenor David Daniels as a featured soloist. (Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ Labadie and his groups return for Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," a capacious masterwork of six interlocked cantatas. (Dec. 12 at 8.) ♦ In a welcome nod to a contemporary master, Carnegie has engaged John Adams to conduct the Orchestra of St. Luke's in "El Niño," his moving, multilingual, and very modern take on the Nativity story. His first-class collaborators include the singers Dawn Upshaw, Michelle DeYoung, and Eric Owens, along with the Westminster Symphonic Choir and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. (Dec. 13 at 8.) (212-247-7800.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
To hear a Christmas concert in the majestic intimacy of the museum's Medieval Sculpture Hall is an essential New York experience. For several years, the exciting and expert Chanticleer, a male chorus from San Francisco, has been drawing capacity audiences. Their program offers a tempting mixture of carols, contemporary songs, and sacred polyphony from the medieval and Renaissance periods. (Nov. 30, Dec. 1, and Dec. 3 at 6:30 and 8:30.) ♦ Another spirited program comes from the Inspirational Voices of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, performing carols, spirituals, and gospel music. (Dec. 10 at 6:30 and 8:30.) ♦ As the holiday nears, Lionheart, New York's admired male chamber choir, offers "Tydings Trew: Feasts of Christmas in Medieval England." (Dec. 22 at 6:30 and 8:30.) (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS
Bach's six chamber concertos, the bedrock of the orchestral repertoire, have long been Christmastime favorites. Some of the most engaging performances are always provided by the formidable musicians of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, who, back home at Alice Tully Hall, present two complete cycles. (212-875-5788. Dec. 13 at 5 and Dec. 15 at 7:30.) ♦ Upper West Siders have another way to Brandenburg: at Symphony Space's "All-Star" performance, an event that includes such reliable players as the flutist Eugenia Zukerman, the clarinettist Alan Kay, and the harpsichordist Bradley Brookshire. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 20 at 7.) ♦ Bargemusic, the floating chamber-music series anchored at Brooklyn's Fulton Ferry Landing, is a cozy winter nook that offers spectacular views of New York Harbor and wine and cheese at intermission. The violinist Mark Peskanov leads a band of New York's finest young musicians in a concert on New Year's Eve. (718-624-2083. Dec. 31 at 7:30.)

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AMERICAN TREASURE
13P presents an avant-garde mystery thriller by Julia Jarcho, loosely based on the movie "National Treasure: Book of Secrets." In previews. Opens Nov. 29. (Paradise Factory, 64 E. 4th St. 212-613-3119.)

DO NOT GO GENTLE
Geraint Wyn Davies stars in Leon Pownall's portrait of Dylan Thomas, which imagines the poet in Purgatory reflecting on his life. In previews. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE GREAT RECESSION
The Flea presents ten-minute plays by Thomas Bradshaw, Sheila Callaghan, Erin Courtney, Will Eno, Itamar Moses, and Adam Rapp. In previews. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER
Rebecca Gilman wrote this play, based on the novel by Carson McCullers, in which an itinerant deaf loner ends up in a small Southern town during the Depression. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
Catherine Zeta-Jones, Angela Lansbury, and Alexander Hanson star in Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's musical, based on Ingmar Bergman's "Smiles of a Summer Night," a romantic comedy revolving around the affairs of an actress at a Swedish country house. Trevor Nunn directs. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

MERRICK, THE ELEPHANT MAN
"Brits Off Broadway" includes the U.S. première of a play by Mary Swan and Saul Jaffé, which is based on the story of Joseph Carey Merrick and incorporates circus elements such as the trapeze. Jaffé stars; Swan directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 1. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

RACE
David Mamet directs the world première of his new play, starring James Spader, David Alan Grier, Kerry Washington, and Richard Thomas. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SO HELP ME GOD!
Mint Theatre Company presents a revival of Maurine Dallas Watkins's 1929 comedy, in which a diva actress is threatened by her understudy. Kristen Johnston and Anna Chlumsky star; Jonathan Bank directs. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
Cate Blanchett stars in Tennessee Williams's play from 1947, in a Sydney Theatre Company production, directed by Liv Ullmann. Previews begin Nov. 27. Opens Dec. 1. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THIS
Julianne Nicholson stars in a new play by Melissa James Gibson, about a widowed failed poet entering her forties who is raising a ten-year-old daughter and starting to date. Directed by Daniel Aukin. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

ZELOOT

NOW PLAYING

THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS
Tarell Alvin McCraney is a precocious (and pretentious) African-American talent whose trilogy ("Part 1: In the Red and Brown Water," directed by Tina Landau, and "Part 2: The Brothers Size" and "Marcus; or, The Secret of Sweet," directed by Robert O'Hara) comes covered with European praise. These simple tales of loss, suffering, and sexual confusion, set in the Louisiana bayou, are told in a slick, abstract manner, in which the actors speak the stage directions as well as their lines. The stop-action effect puts a thick Brechtian impasto of production over thin material, detaching the audience from characters who are only sketchily drawn. Brecht used the effect to make his audience think about social issues. McCraney, who seems to have no social issues, uses them just for effect. August Wilson's plays were about African-Americans owning their story; McCraney's plays, in their stylistic extravagance, seem to somehow want to disown the African-American experience. The ensemble of actors is excellent and the direction is inventive, but over all the play is more chic than sharp. It takes a long time to grow a playwright; it remains to be seen whether McCraney's indubitable gifts will flourish in the soil in which he seems intent on planting them. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

DREAMGIRLS
The Apollo Theatre is the first stop on a national tour of this revival of the 1981 musical, about the rise of an all-girl singing group from Chicago in the sixties. With music by Henry Krieger and book and lyrics by Tom Eyen; Robert Longbottom choreographs and directs. (253 W. 125th St. 212-307-4100.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs this musical about Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the activist musician who pioneered Afro-beat. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones; music performed onstage by members of Antibalas. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

FINIAN'S RAINBOW
Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs the 1947 musical. (Reviewed in this issue.) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY
Les Waters directs Sarah Ruhl's Broadway début. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE: PART I
The first part of Horton Foote's nine-play saga (which is being produced in three installments by the Signature Theatre Company and Hartford Stage) charts the early years of Horace Robedaux (played by three different actors), based on Foote's father, in turn-of-the-century Texas. Discarded by his mother after his father's drunken demise, Horace ages from a cheery boy (Dylan Riley Snyder) into an unfazed adolescent (Henry Hodges) working at a plantation store so he can buy a tombstone for his father, and, finally, into a laconic young man (Bill Heck) whom dispossession has made soul-sick. Foote was a decidedly un-grand dramatist, and the scale of the cycle belies its shrewdness and its reserve. Michael Wilson's fluid but stagy production, whose cast includes the playwright's daughter Hallie, shares Foote's muted sense of ambition, one that fed on the potency of small moments. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101.)

POST NO BILLS
When Audry Esparza comes onstage as Reyna, a foul-mouthed, homeless seventeen-year-old Mexican orphan who has travelled from Laredo to New York City to become a famous singer, the audience moves to the edge of their seats, and the other actors in Mando Alvarado's tiny music-filled play, who are already doing very well, do better. Set to Sandra Rubio's charming music for buskers, busked by Rubio herself—and by Teddy Cañez, who plays Reyna's childhood idol, a has-been Tex-Mex pop star named Esteban—Esparza tap-dances, yodels, claps in double time, and sings beautifully. The unrequited love between Reyna and Esteban, who is old enough to be her father, is moving, and so is the ensemble. All the actors—including John-Martin Green, as a blind beggar, and Wade Allain-Marcus, as a young hipster—could be reading the phone book and the show would still be worth the price of admission. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

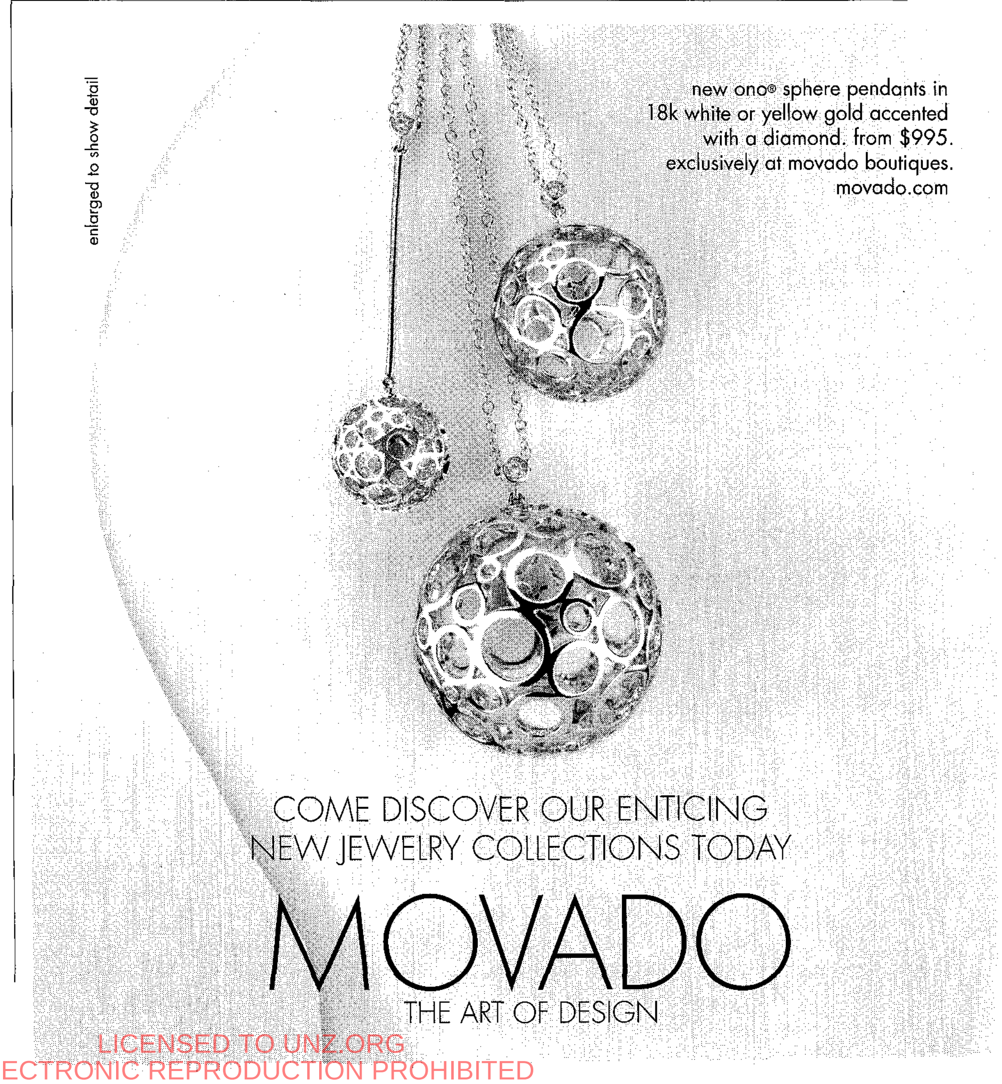
RAGTIME
The creators of the 1998 musical version of "Ragtime" (based on the novel by E. L. Doctorow, about life in New York City in 1906)—Terrence McNally, Stephen Flaherty, and Lynn Ahrens wrote the book, the score, and the lyrics, respectively—take advantage of Doctorow's imaginative verve, but, unfortunately, they also drag the production down with a number of clichés and caricatures that soften and undermine Doctorow's unsentimental, loving but tough point of view. In the revival, directed and choreographed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge, the opening scene is the most successful of the show—and it's where we have the greatest concentration of McNally's book. Once it passes into Flaherty and Ahrens's hands, it becomes less a musical than a series of saccharine arias and duets that are made to carry most of the weight of exposition as well. It's to the discredit of the creators of "Ragtime" that they use the surefire manipulation of nostalgia to sweeten the bitter truths that are laced throughout Doctorow's grander vision. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/23/09.) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.)

THE STARRY MESSENGER
Kenneth Lonergan wrote and directs this drama for the New Group, starring Matthew Broderick as a planetarium lecturer and Catalina Sandino Moreno ("Maria Full of Grace") as the single mother he falls in love with. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

WOLVES AT THE WINDOW
Part of 59E59's "Brits Off Broadway" series, Toby Davies's adaptation of ten Saki short stories is a nicely staged, well-crafted, finely acted, and elegant exercise in superficial silliness. Everyone has names like Mrs. Packletide and Loona Bimberton; coatracks stand in for trees, umbrellas for hunting rifles. The plots are clever and absurd: a poor young artist comes to ask for his girlfriend's hand in marriage and ends up renaming her father's failing cereal brand Filboid Studge, thus making him a millionaire; a woman hunting for a tiger skin to show up a braggart of a friend ends up bagging a goat instead—but the gunshot is so loud that it gives the tiger a heart attack and it dies anyway. In another vignette, Dr. Agnes Appin teaches a couple's cat, Tobermory, how to speak; at first the couple is pleased, but when they discover that the cat is telling all the animals in the neighborhood about what goes on in the couple's bedroom, they send him out to be slaughtered. Recommended only for audiences who find animals played by Englishmen funny. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

AFTER MISS JULIE: American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **AVENUE Q:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BYE BYE BIRDIE:** Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE EMPEROR JONES:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAMLET:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IDIOT SAVANT:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN:** Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **LET ME DOWN EASY:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **MEMPHIS:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NIGHTINGALE:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **THE ROYAL FAMILY:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **A STEADY RAIN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SUPERIOR DONUTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE UNDERSTUDY:** Laura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NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

The clown Bello Nock is back with the Big Apple Circus, at Lincoln Center.

JORDAN AWAN

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Nov. 25: Rising from the basements of New Brunswick, the **Screaming Females** are beginning to get the attention that they deserve after stealing the show at this year's CMJ festival with their high-octane garage punk.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 25: In their heyday, the mid-eighties, Arizona's **Meat Puppets** became one of the American underground's most iconoclastic bands by injecting seemingly verboten styles into punk rock—a genre ruled by formula. Splicing blues, country, and psychedelia into their frantic guitar fray, the band—led by the brothers Curt and Cris Kirkwood—staked out a bizarre middle ground between the Grateful Dead and Black Flag. Their acolyte Kurt Cobain helped bring them a wider audience in the nineties, but Cris's drug addiction stymied any real progress. The band endured for a while without him, and then Cris cleaned up and rejoined the group in 2007. They're currently promoting their most recent album, "Sewn Together," which captures the spontaneous vibe of their early efforts.

CARNEGIE HALL
Seventh Ave. at 57th St. (212-247-7800)—Nov. 28: **Arlo Guthrie** returns for his annual holiday show, with a couple of generations of his family in tow.

DEATH BY AUDIO
49 S. 2nd St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Nov. 28: The two-piece D.I.Y. institution **Shellshag** got its start in 1994 running Starcleaners, a legendary San Francisco public arts space that once served as an incubator for bands like the Brian Jonestown Massacre. The pair has since started a label and switched coasts, and their band continues to churn out infectious punk-rock music.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Nov. 28: **David Johansen** promises an evening that cherry-picks from each part of his storied career.

HIRO BALLROOM
371 W. 16th St. (800-745-3000)—Nov. 25: **Bebel Gilberto.** It makes sense that samba and bossa nova were born in Brazil, because Portuguese is the perfect language for those supple rhythms. Gilberto, the daughter of the musicians João Gilberto and Miúcha, was born in New York but she grew up in Rio and has been singing since she was a kid (in 1973, at age seven, she appeared on her mother's début record). She brings a cosmopolitan, pop approach to her Brazilian musical roots, and her latest album, "All in One," includes Stevie Wonder's "The Real Thing" and a duet with Daniel Jobim (you-know-who's grandson) on "Bim Bom."

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Nov. 27: **Elysian Fields** have perfected an affecting mix of dark, breathy vocals and understated yet adventurous accompaniment.

THE MARKET HOTEL
1142 Myrtle Ave., at Broadway, Brooklyn (No phone)—Nov. 27: The U.K. noise architects the **Fuck Buttons,** who played the Bowery Ballroom earlier this month, have added a final New York show to their Stateside tour. Their new record, "Tarot Sport," has garnered almost universal praise for its dexterous navigation of synth-based dance music and noise. It offers warm and repetitive soundscapes that feel downright therapeutic.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Nov. 28: **Mike Doughty** made a name for himself in the early nineties as the front man of Soul Coughing. An inventive alternative act with a penchant for hip-hop and downtown avant-garde, the band got its start at the Knitting Factory, where Doughty was employed as a doorman. After it broke up, in 2000, Doughty went solo. His considerably more pop-oriented music, highlighted by his nasal vocal style, generally attracts Soul Coughing enthusiasts more than any other demographic.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Nov. 27: In 2001, the seductively moody and cool beats of **Zero 7** made their début on the album "Simple Things," which capitalized on the chilled-out trip-hop of genre forefathers like Massive Attack and Portishead, along with their similarly inclined peers Air. While the glory days of that era have slipped away, the band has continued to make electronic music, expanding its sound to encompass a proper pop sensibility.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Forty-five years ago, the keyboardist **Ramsey Lewis's** versions of "The 'In' Crowd," "Hang On Sloopy," and "Wade in the Water" were being played in rotation on Top Forty stations with the Dave Clark Five, the Temptations, and Tom Jones. At the time, they didn't feel like refined jazz so much as a perfect distillation of the swinging sixties. The Chicago gentleman is here with his trio on Nov. 28.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 24-28: The sleek harmonies of the vocal quartet **New York Voices.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 27-29: Now in his late eighties and seemingly unstoppable, the pianist **Dave Brubeck** leads a sturdy quartet that benefits from the supportive foundation and virtuosic improvisations of the bassist **Michael Moore.** Nov. 30: The popular Canadian vocalist **Holly Cole** is an engaging performer with a sly sense of humor and an unerring taste in standards.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—**Steve Tyrell** had his breakthrough in 1991, crooning "The Way You Look Tonight" in "Father of the Bride." No wonder: with his saxophonic voice and cornball sense of humor, he's the Platonic ideal of a wedding singer. His fifth consecutive holiday engagement at the Carlyle includes standards by the likes of Berlin and Ellington, backed by a seven-piece jazz band. He's here through Dec. 31.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 29: **Wynton Marsalis.** Although Marsalis is accustomed to performing his music in the grand Rose Theatre, down the hall, this intimate club setting will showcase the soaring power of his trumpet and the compact-orchestral heft of his precisely calibrated quintet.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Nov. 27-28: The Irish singer **Ronan Tynan** combines vocal pyrotechnics and unapologetic sentimentality, a crowd-pleasing combination his fans never grow weary of.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Nov. 25: In the forefront of the contemporary big-band scene, **Darcy James Argue's Secret Society** couches the melodicism of its leader's tunes in dramatic sonic textures. Nov. 26-27: **Mark Murphy,** a paragon of the art of vocal improvisation since the fifties, has an eclectic repertoire that ranges from original compositions and standards to songs by Coldplay and Johnny Cash. Nov. 28-29: **Jimmy Scott,** the grand old man of jazz singing.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 24-25 and Nov. 27-29: Besides turkey, Thanksgiving week now means the return of the composer, arranger, and big-band leader **Maria Schneider** and her orchestra. Commanding a sizable ensemble that features horns, guitar, and accordion, Schneider is careful to leave space in the performance for such inspired soloists as the saxophonist **Rich Perry** and the trumpeter **Ingrid Jensen.**

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Nov. 27: The pianist **Mike Longo**, best remembered for a well-regarded stint with Dizzy Gillespie.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 24-29: The pianist **Renee Rosnes** and her quartet.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Velázquez Rediscovered."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"The 'Young Archer,' Attributed to Michelangelo."** Ongoing. ♦ **"Vermeer's Masterpiece 'The Milkmaid.'"** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Watteau, Music, and Theater."** Through Nov. 29. ♦ **"Eccentric Visions: The World of Luo Ping (1733-1799)."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Tim Burton."** Through April 26. ♦ **"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Projects 91: Artur Zmijewski."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Paul Sietsema."** Through Feb. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Anish Kapoor: Memory."** Through March 28. ♦ **"Paired, Gold: Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"Intervals: Kitty Kraus."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Roni Horn aka Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Steve Wolfe on Paper."** Through Nov. 29. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History, 1955 to the Present."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ.'"** Through Jan. 17. ♦ **"Body Parts: Ancient Egyptian Fragments and Amulets."** Through Oct. 2. ♦ **"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found."** Through Jan. 24. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World."** Through Aug. 15. ♦ **"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 31. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"Serizawa: Master of Japanese Textile Design."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life."** Through Feb. 7. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy."** Through March 14. ♦ **"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—**"Voces y Visiones: Four Decades Through El Museo del Barrio's Permanent Collection."** Through Feb. 28. ♦ **"Nexus New York: Latin /American Artists in the Modern Metropolis."** Through Feb. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Only in New York: Photographs from *Look* Magazine."** Through Jan. 18. ♦ **"Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York City."** Through March 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1 Bowling Green (212-514-3700)—**"A Song for the Horse Nation."** Through July 7. (Daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"From Klimt to Klee: Masterworks from the Serge Sabarsky Collection."** Through Feb. 15. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Urs Fischer: Marguerite de Ponty."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"Nikhil Chopra: Yog Raj Chitrakar, Memory Drawing IX."** Through Feb. 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"1969."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Between Spaces."** Through April 5. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

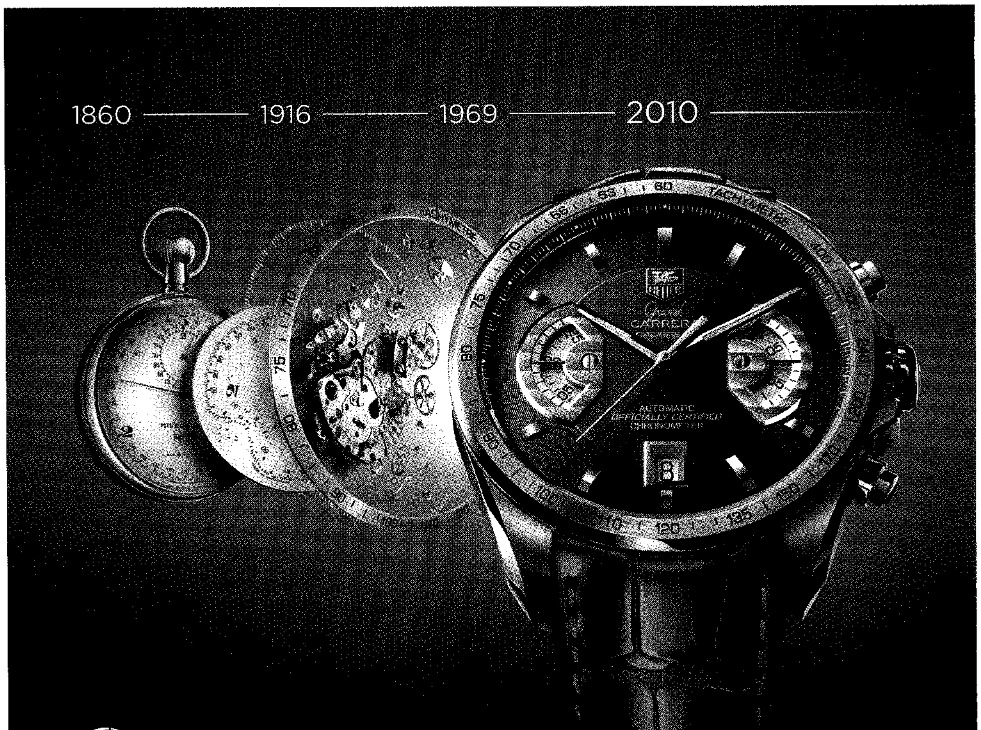
RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—**"The Red Book of C. G. Jung."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"A Voyage of Growth and Discovery: Mike Kelley and Michael Smith."** Through Dec. 30. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"30 Seconds Off an Inch."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Wardell Milan: Drawings of Harlem."** Through March 14. ♦ **"A Delicate Touch: Watercolors from the Permanent Collection."** Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

ROGER BALLEN
The American-born, South Africa-based photographer's strongest show so far is also his most provocative. Working with squatters living in an abandoned warehouse outside Johannesburg, Ballen creates and photographs grungy environments in which broken toys, childish drawings, small animals, and disembodied figures—three hands, a foot, a half-obscured face—come together in absurd, sometimes comic combinations. Ballen's sensibility is appropriately outsider, with an appreciation for the abject that recalls Dubuffet, Bellmer, early Rauschenberg, and Mike Kelley. Once a portraitist, Ballen has gone from recording blunt facts to staging brief nightmares—moments in which the discarded dolls take over, tangled wires snake through the room, and the graf-



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fiti heads start to scream. Through Dec. 23. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

DOUG DUBOIS

Although they separated over the twenty-five-year course of this project, DuBois's mother and father are at the emotional core of his show of color photographs. The drama remains offstage, but tension reverberates in even the most ordinary situations (Mom smoking in the backyard, Dad drinking in the kitchen) and gives the images an edge of unease. Like similarly fraught family pictures by Larry Sultan, Tina Barney, and Mitch Epstein, DuBois's images are at once tender and ruthless. You sense that, as his subjects' son, any distance he's achieved is hard-won, and it's balanced by affection and concern that extend to his sister and nephew, the subjects of several photographs that widen the family circle. Through Dec. 5. (Higher Pictures, 764 Madison Ave., at 65th St. 212-249-6100.)

GERHARD RICHTER

Richter swells his legacy of astringent beauty with a myriad of new smeared abstract oils, in several formats and in hues ranging from mother-of-pearl to flame-red. Forty-nine pairs of glass panes, paint-splotched from behind, occupy two walls with decorative sublimity. A print reproduces "September," a recent painting of the World Trade Center in extremis: the towers in closeup, with hideous smoke smudging lovely blue sky. (It's as if the art of painting itself, asleep, were having a nightmare.) Richter remains, at full force, both the grandest and the finest of living artists. Through Jan. 9. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

Short List

BRUCE DAVIDSON: Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Jan. 2. **PHILIP GUSTON:** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951. Through Dec. 31. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Dec. 24. **PAUL MCCARTHY:** Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970. Through Dec. 9. **EGON SCHIELE:** Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734. Through Jan. 23. **JANE WILSON:** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Dec. 23. **"THE ORIGINS OF EL GRECO: ICON PAINTING IN VENETIAN CRETE":** Onassis Cultural Center, 645 Fifth Ave., at 51st. 212-486-4448. Through Feb. 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

WILLIAM CORDOVA

Do not miss this. The Peruvian-born Cordova is a laconic magus of metaphysical intimations in a blizzard of rough subjects, such as street gangs and graffiti, and materials that range from old LP covers and scraps of varied trash to gold leaf. Borges and Paz are cited, apropos labyrinths, without pretension. In a grainy video projection, just seconds long, a rimless bicycle tire rolls, wobbling, at a decrepit urban site, to a snatch of rap: "Get what I'm saying. Forever." A title card gives an exact latitude and longitude. Any event, while it occurs, is the center of the universe and a portal to eternity. Through Dec. 5. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

SHANNON EBNER

Known for photographs of words in landscapes (letters spelling out the word "nausea" propped up near the ocean, for instance), Ebner continues to probe the possibilities of text-based images in her latest show, "Invisible Language Workshop." But much of her new work takes the idea of writing less literally, with abstract and allusive results. The absence of text on a sequence of ten lined notebook pages emphasizes their minimalist severity, softened by a gradual darkening of the images. A spill and splatter of black paint could be an exploding exclamation point, while a scuffed-up pegboard reads like a series of ellipses, suggesting that much remains unsaid. Through Dec. 19. (Wallspace, 619 W. 27th St. 212-594-9478.)

ERIC FISCHL

Fischl's best show in years brings his neo-academic painterly realism to bear on bullfighting, in canvases based on photographs he took at a corrida in Andalusia. Slender, splendidly attired *toreros* deal with massive, suffering bulls in fierce sunlight and deep shadow, at nearly life-size scale. Yellows and oranges are as strident as trumpets. In one picture, a matador seems to present his bloody sword to the gaze of a fallen animal that is dying of its thrust. Strong stuff. Through Dec. 19. (Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929.)

DAN FLAVIN

Go for swims in sacral light. Several great Flavin installations make for as many chapels of secular transcendence, achingly beautiful. A sequence of three rooms with fluorescent tubes—red and yellow, red and blue, and red and green—plays amazing hob with your optic nerve, as floods of intense gold, hyacinth blue, and apple green deliquesce gradually to near-white that is tinted yellow, violet, and chartreuse. Elsewhere, a long barrier of cool white tubes, in a huge room, precipitates a lagoon of gray-blueness as much felt, and almost smelled, as seen. Flavin's classical art leaves nothing to be desired. Through Dec. 23. (Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

WAYNE GONZALES

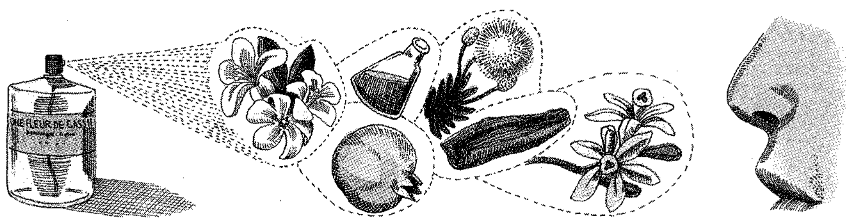
If you wear glasses, doff them here, the better—more blurrily—to enjoy the impression that gridded train headlights are bearing down on you, in inky darkness, from each of seven large new acrylics by Gonzales. Re-bespectacled, observe how each light is a scrunched white head-shape with many surrounding, thin borders in graduated grays that whisper of other colors as, in some cases, they shade into vertiginous black holes. The effect is baroque in reverse: spatially complex and legible up close, clenched and nebulous from afar. The excitement of the work is instantly addictive: not exactly pleasurable, but compulsive. You want it to not stop. Through Dec. 18. (Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

MIKE KELLEY

Kelley's youngish fans like how he brackets their cultural education with low-down sneers. Large scatological paintings on jigsawed blob shapes, mounted on ranks of base-boarded panels in pretty colors, evoke and insult institutional and home-decorating protocols. Small paintings, shelved, juxtapose flagrant transsexuals and frogs to rub the viewer's nose in something or other. Cruelty to children seems not only the subject but the method of some videos. What might it take to mellow Mike? Through Dec. 23. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

Short List

ROZ CHAST: Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Jan. 9. **BRUCE DAVIDSON:** Wolkowitz, 505 W. 24th St. 212-243-8830. Through Dec. 19. **CARROLL DUNHAM:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Dec. 5. **SPENCER FINCH:** Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323. Through Nov. 28. **WALTON FORD:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474. Through Dec. 23. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Dec. 24. **SHARON HORVATH:** Bookstein, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-750-0949. Through Nov. 25. **MICHAEL JOO:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Dec. 5. **SISTER CORITA KENT:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Dec. 5. **SYLVIA SLEIGH:** I-20, 557 W. 23rd St. 212-645-1100. Through Dec. 31. **"BESIDES, WITH, AGAINST, AND YET: ABSTRACTION AND THE READYMADE GESTURE":** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Jan. 16.



ON AND OFF THE AVENUE
FRÉDÉRIC MALLE BOUTIQUE

898 Madison Ave. (212-249-7941)—"Fragrance is the most intimate thing you can buy," Frédéric Malle, a suave Frenchman, said the other day, showing me around the newly opened Manhattan branch of his Paris-based company. "It's with you even in bed." Monsieur Malle knows his stuff. "I can identify any fragrance, and almost sing the formulas," he went on, adding that his maternal grandfather concocted Dior's eponymous fragrance in 1947. Malle regards himself as a "publisher" rather than a perfume designer. The Editions de Parfums Frédéric Malle, started in 2000, puts out eighteen scents, each of which has been developed by a nose whose name is printed prominently on the package label, an unprecedented thing in an industry where the olfactory artists are usually anonymous. The perfumes, sold in simple cylindrical vials, are clinically displayed within a refrigerated armoire in the shop, which is decorated sparsely with Art Deco furniture and art from Malle's Paris apartment. Why the conspicuous lack of scent? Malle dislikes perfumeries that smell like duty-free shops, and so he has patented a glass-and-steel contraption that redresses this problem. It is called the smelling column, and it looks like the Orgasmatron from "Sleeper." "They are to fragrances what mirrors are to garments," Malle said. Demonstrating his invention, he opened the door of one—there are three in the shop—spritzed a blast of Fleur de Cassie inside, and instructed me to step in and take a whiff. Post-sniff, he pushed a button, and voilà, the scent was sucked away. Since I am not fluent in perfume-ese, please permit Malle to describe the lovely aroma: "A floral Oriental with sandalwood, vanilla, and amber, topped by cassis absolute, jasmine, and mimosa, followed by a trace of aldehyde." *Bien sûr.* (50 ml. of perfume, $115-$200.)

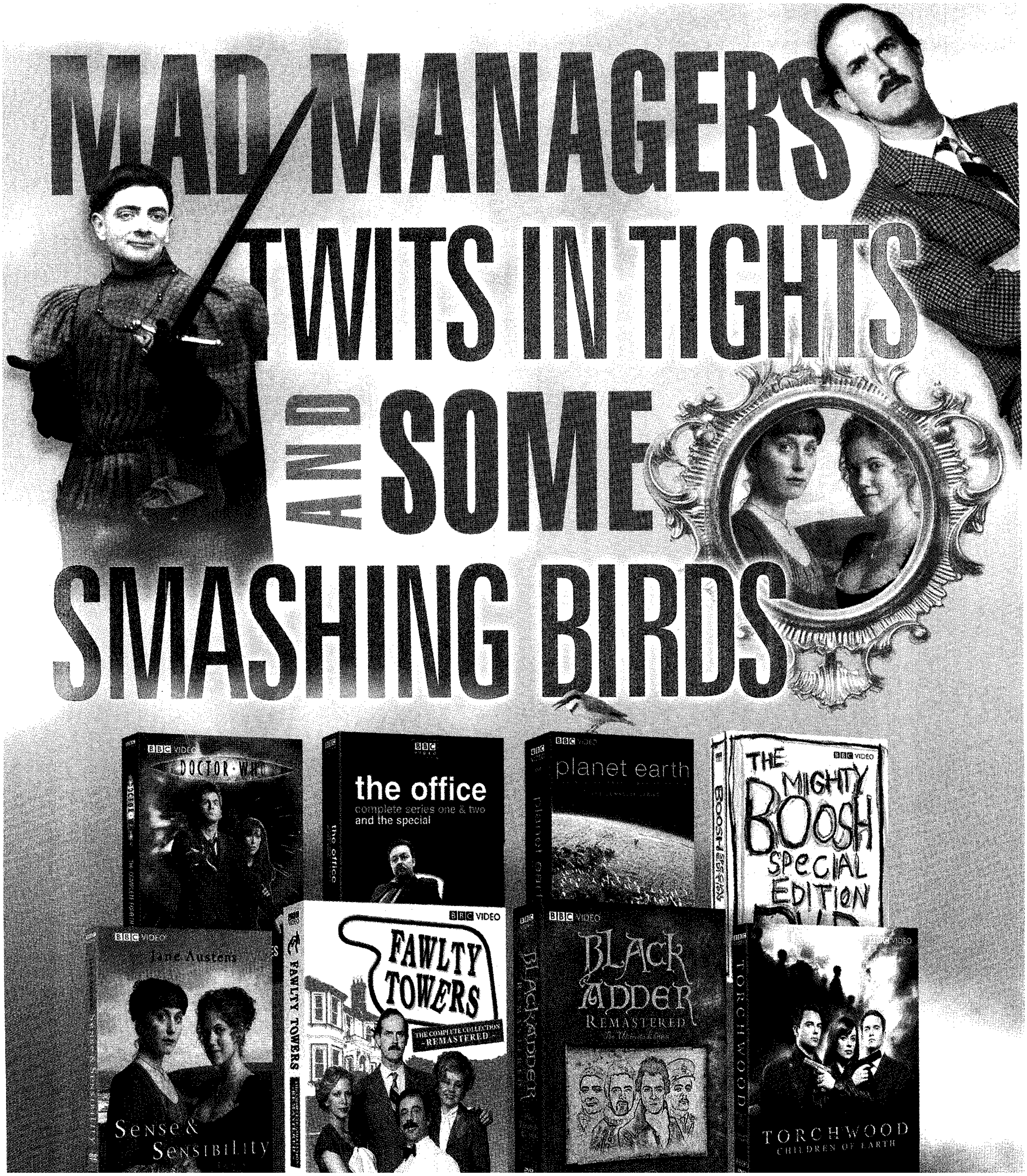
—*Patricia Marx*

SILJA GÖTZ

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

Where would the City Ballet be without its "Nutcracker"? Balanchine's 1954 staging of this holiday classic, inspired by his memories of the Kirov production he knew as a child, has been entertaining and delighting children (and their parents) for generations. It is also the company's lifeblood, providing weeks of full houses, and a testing ground for


MAD MANAGERS
TWITS IN TIGHTS
AND SOME
SMASHING BIRDS
BBC VIDEO
DOCTOR WHO
the office
complete series one & two and the special
planet earth
THE MIGHTY BOOSH SPECIAL EDITION DVD
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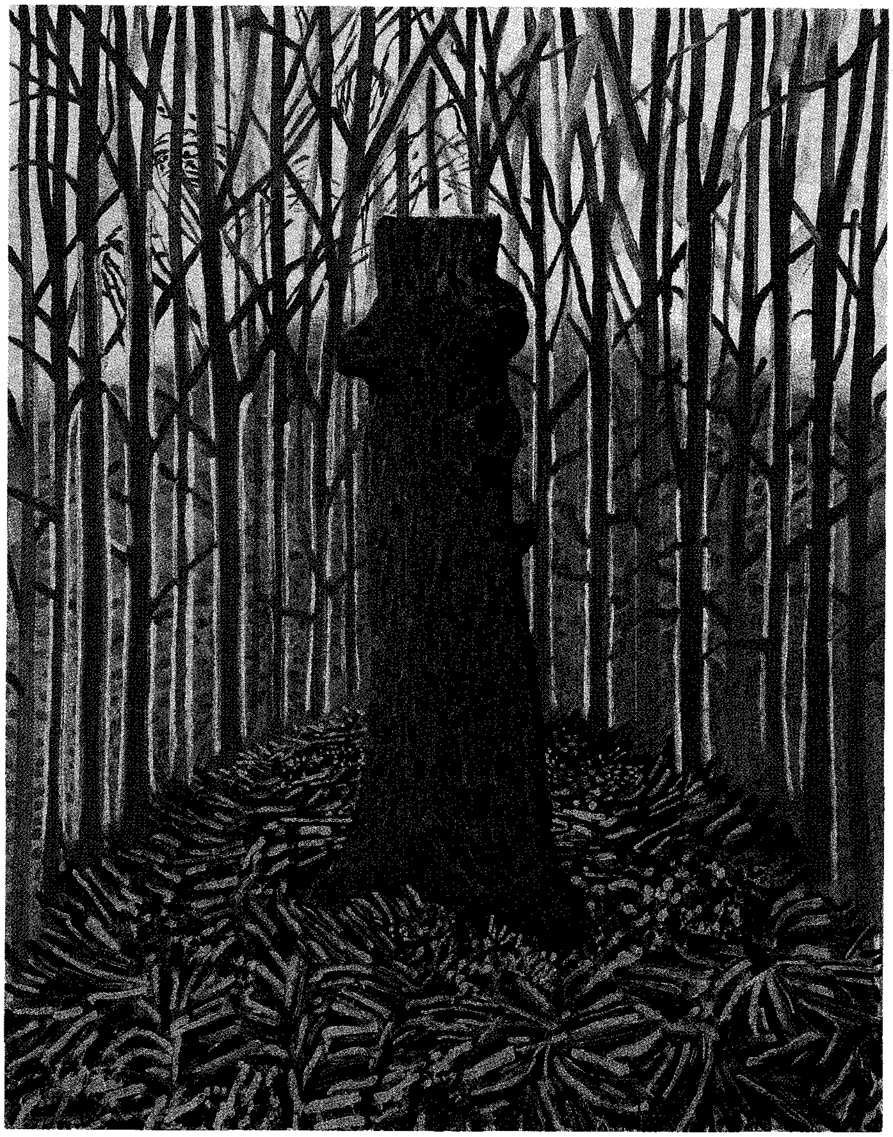
FAWLTY TOWERS
THE COMPLETE COLLECTION REMASTERED
BLACK ADDER REMASTERED
TORCHWOOD CHILDREN OF EARTH



David Hockney's painting "Totem Tree" (2008), at PaceWildenstein.

its younger dancers in many featured roles, from Candy Cane to Sugarplum Fairy. And who can resist the multitudes of well-trained children (picked from the School of American Ballet) in parts like Party Guest, Angel, and Polichinelle? (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Nov. 27 at 8, Nov. 28 at 2 and 8, Nov. 29 at 1 and 5, and Dec. 1 at 6. Through Jan. 3.)

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET
The dancers of this troupe, founded by the former Ailey members Desmond Richardson and Dwight Rhoden, are gorgeous and hyper-confident; the choreography packs a punch (early Forsythe comes to mind); the music is loud; and once in a while we get to see the marvellous Richardson in action. Its fifteenth-anniversary season at the Joyce, divided into three programs, looks back but also forward, with two new works by Rhoden, "Dirty Wire" and "Mercy," as well as new pieces by the company member Juan Antonio Rodriguez and the ballet master Jae Man Joo. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 24-25 at 7:30, Nov. 27 at 8, Nov. 28 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 29 at 2 and 7:30.)

CZECHOSLOVAK-AMERICAN MARIONETTE THEATRE
The Prague-born Vít Hořejš's intimate production of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," performed by sixteen eight-inch marionettes (and three puppeteer-actors) on three tea trays, closes La Mama's "Puppet Series." (74 E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Nov. 27-28 at 8 and Nov. 29 at 2:30.)

"NUTCRACKER IN THE LOWER"
Are all the candy canes and angels getting you down? Urban Ballet Theatre offers an alternative, multicultural "Nutcracker," set in a Lower East Side housing project, with krumping rats, fan dancing, and salsa-laced revelry. But here, too, the proceedings lead to a balletic apotheosis, in which Clara imagines an idealized version of her own family, embodied by the Sugarplum Fairy and her Cavalier. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Nov. 28 at 3 and 7:30 and Nov. 29 at 3. Through Dec. 5.)

BALLET HISPANICO
The enduring house that Tina Ramirez built enters a new phase as Eduardo Vilaro takes over as artistic director. For his first season at the Joyce, Vilaro brings in new choreographers. Andrea Miller, whose heritage is both Spanish and Jewish American, takes on a Sephardic theme in "Nací." In "Tríptico," Ron De Jesús spins three couples into intertwining, acrobatic pas de deux, energized by Oscar Hernández's score for piano and percussion, played live. Three programs shuffle these premières among revivals of "Goodnight Paradise" (1994) and "Batucada Fantástica" (1982), along with the good-time favorite "Club Havana" (2000). (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 1 at 7:30. Through Dec. 13.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Jack O'Brien's production of Puccini's **"Il Trittico,"** a hit of the 2006-07 season, uses big sets and broad emotions (and some of the same singers) to make each of the three one-acts—the tragic "Il Tabarro" and "Suor Angelica" and the hilarious "Gianni Schicchi"—seem like a chapter in the life of a voluble Italian family. The sterling ensemble cast features Patricia Racette, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stephanie Blythe, and Alessandro Corbelli; Stefano Ranzani conducts. (Nov. 25 and Dec. 1 at 8 and Nov. 28 at 1.) ♦ The excellent Fabio Luisi conducts **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** featuring Annette Dasch, Lisette Oropesa, Isabel Leonard, Ludovic Tézier, and Luca Pisaroni in the leading roles. (Nov. 27 and Nov. 30 at 8.) ♦ After Luc Bondy's limp staging of "Tosca" flopped on opening night, the Met needed a solid hit, and it has one with Patrice Chéreau's riveting yet humane production of **"From the House of the Dead,"** Janáček's towering final opera, a free adaptation of Dostoyevsky's prison-camp novel. Stefan Margita, Peter Mattei, and Kurt Streit are but three standouts in the committed ensemble cast; Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts with streamlined intensity. (Nov. 28 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Riccardo Muti, completing a two-week residency with the orchestra, leads it in the kind of broad-shouldered repertory he favors: Honegger's Symphony No. 2 (which ends with a triumphant chorale) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, "Eroica." (Nov. 27-28 at 8.) ♦ Muti also conducts the "Eroica" in a Saturday-matinée concert that begins with a performance of Schoenberg's string sextet, "Verklärte Nacht" (featuring the violinist Glenn Dicterow and the violist Cynthia Phelps). (Nov. 28 at 2.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA: "TRADITIONS AND TRANSMIGRATIONS"
Since moving downstairs to Carnegie's Zankel Hall, the orchestra has turned its focus away from the Romantic-modernist repertory that dominated its concerts in Stern Auditorium. Music by Charles Ives crowns a program of new music by several intrepid fellow-spirits: Curt Cacioppo, Erin Gee ("Mouthpiece XIII," a collaboration with her brother, the actor Colin Gee), Huang Ruo, and Donal Fox ("Peace Out," for improvised piano and orchestra). Stefan Lano conducts. (Nov. 30 at 7:30. 212-247-7800.)

CHANTICLEER
The delightful American choral ensemble performs at the Metropolitan Museum (see Holiday Music—Classical). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Nov. 30, Dec. 1, and Dec. 3 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

COLLEGIATE CHORALE: "A JUBILANT SONG"
After a long record of distinction under the late Robert Bass, the chorus celebrates the arrival of its new music director, James Bagwell, with a gala concert featuring performances by such guests as the tenor Salvatore Licitra and the soprano Emily Pulley. The selections (including music by Beethoven, Verdi, and Meyerbeer) are accompanied by the American Symphony Orchestra. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 1 at 7.)

RECITALS

THE STONE
Cornelius Dufallo, a prominent violinist (with the string quartet Ethel) and composer on the downtown scene, has a starring role at John Zorn's little storefront performance space this week. Nov. 27 at 8: Ne(x)tworks, which Dufallo directs, features a group of admired performers (such as the vocalist Joan La Barbara and the electro-acoustic harpist Shelley Burgon) playing their own works. The pianist Stephen Gosling joins the program to offer Earle Brown's early piano work "Home Burial." ♦ Nov. 29 at 8: Dufallo returns with "Journaling (Part One)," an evening of new and recent music for violin that features pieces by Anna Clyne, Corey Dargel ("Every Day Is the Same Day," with the composer as vocalist), Alexandra Gardner, Annie Gosfield ("Lost Signals and Drifting Satellites,"

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a captivating piece of *musique concrète*), and Dufallo himself. (Avenue C at 2nd St. Tickets at the door.)

BARGEMUSIC

Nov. 27 at 8: With the Mendelssohn bicentennial year ebbing fast, the pianist Roberto Prosseda offers a clutch of "Songs Without Words" (as well as the "Sonate Écossaise") along with "M," a modern Mendelssohn fantasia by Michele Dall'Ongaro. ♦ Nov. 28 at 8 and Nov. 29 at 3: The violist Mark Peskanov (the barge's director) joins his protégés in the Neos Quartet in works by Beethoven, Schumann, and Mendelssohn (the String Quintet No. 2 in B-Flat Major). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER TRIO: "HAYDN IN LONDON"

The harpsichordist Elaine Comparone joins two longtime colleagues, the violinist Robert Zubrycki and the cellist Peter Seidenberg, to perform four of Haydn's trios (including No. 19 in G Minor and No. 24 in D Major) dedicated to two of his young admirers, Princess Maria Anna Esterházy and Rebecca Schroeter (with whom he enjoyed a passionate affair). (St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Nov. 29 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

ANGELIKA KIRCHSCHLAGER

The radiant Austrian mezzo-soprano, a master of the art song, joins the commanding pianist Warren Jones to offer music by Mahler (six lieder from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"), Brahms, Wolf, and Reynaldo Hahn at Alice Tully Hall. (212-721-6500. Nov. 29 at 5.)

JOHN HOLLENBECK LARGE ENSEMBLE

A set by the jazz and new-music percussionist's big band is the closing act in a capacious evening at (Le) Poisson Rouge that begins with performances by the violinist Todd Reynolds and the vibraphonist Matt Moran (excerpts from the new disk "Rainbow Jimmies," with Hollenbeck) and by Future Quest, an ensemble (featuring the vocalist Theo Bleckmann) devoted to the music of Meredith Monk. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Nov. 30 at 8.)

"DARMSTADT" FESTIVAL: "IN C"

The cutting-edge series celebrates its fifth anniversary with its annual offering of Terry Riley's minimalist masterpiece, an event that will include among its performers such new-music regulars as Luke DuBois, Jessica Pavone, Chris McIntyre, Max Mandel, and Alan Licht. (Galapagos Art Space, 16 Main St. at Water St., Brooklyn. www.galapagosartspace.com. Nov. 30 at 8.)

ARDITTI QUARTET

Europe's reigning avant-garde string quartet plays the ultra-moderns with pinpoint accuracy and zealous commitment. It offers a pair of concerts at (Le) Poisson Rouge. Dec. 1 at 7:30: Music by Birtwistle (the U.S. première of "The Tree of Strings"), Nancarrow, and Xenakis. ♦ Dec. 1 at 9:30: The jazz master Uri Caine joins the group for a set of his "Caprices for String Quartet and Piano." (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com.)

JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

The magnificent foursome—including its new first violinist, the former Met Orchestra concertmaster Nick Eanet—performs quartets by Schubert (the rarely heard "Rosamunde"), Bartók, and Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 135). (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 1 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

MOVIES OPENING

HOME

Ursula Meier directed this drama, starring Isabelle Huppert, about the disruption of a family's life by the construction of a highway. Opening Nov. 27. (In limited release.)

ME AND ORSON WELLES

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 25. (In wide release.)

NINJA ASSASSINS

An action drama, directed by James McTeigue, about a clash between two warriors from the same clan. Opening Nov. 25. (In wide release.)

OLD DOGS

Robin Williams and John Travolta star in this comedy, as old friends who gain joint custody of a young boy. Directed by Walt Becker. Opening Nov. 25. (In wide release.)

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF PIPPA LEE

Robin Wright Penn stars in this drama, written and directed by Rebecca Miller, about a married woman whose troubled past returns. Opening Nov. 27. (In wide release.)

THE ROAD

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 25. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE BLIND SIDE

The director and screenwriter John Lee Hancock's adaptation of Michael Lewis's nonfiction book is a multi-million-dollar cheeseburger—hard to resist, savory, comforting, and fundamentally unwholesome. The story, which takes place in Memphis, Tennessee, concerns the transformation of Michael Oher, a black teen-ager whose mother was a crack addict, from a street kid to an All-American college football player, thanks to the intervention of the wealthy white Tuohy family. Sandra Bullock gleefully tears into the role of Leigh Anne Tuohy, the fierce, salty, flamboyant young matriarch who takes Michael into her home and her family and becomes both his protector and his mentor, and Quintin Aaron brings a calm grace to the role of Michael. The movie is done with crispness, vigor, down-home humor, and an overall tang of good feeling, but the pushing of buttons is the work of extraordinary calculation. Michael and the Tuohys come off as paragons of virtue, and the bad guys—from indifferent teachers and predatory drug dealers to country-club ladies and unevolved country folk—are situated safely outside and clearly labelled. There's a lot of "redneck"-baiting here, all done by conservative Christian Republicans (the team Michael plays for is even called the Crusaders). Hancock's extremely selective view of Southern life offers a vision of anti-racism devoid of liberalism and presents young Michael as a living tabula rasa on which to project Tuohy-family values.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

THE BOX

A piece of religio-mystico-eschatological humbug by the undeniably talented Richard Kelly (the writer and director of "Donnie Darko"). The movie is set in 1976, soon after a photographic probe of Mars suggests that there might be "forces" out there in the universe taking an interest in us. A man in a topcoat and homburg (Frank Langella), a courtly gent who has had part of his face sheared away by a lightning bolt, shows up at the house of a NASA engineer (James Marsden) and his schoolteacher wife (Cameron Diaz). He tells them that if they push a button on a globular device he leaves behind, someone they don't know will die and they will collect a million dollars in cash. Naturally, the button gets pushed, with terrible consequences. Kelly has a tactile feeling for watery surfaces, and he works with vast industrial spaces—huge research installations that seem to be all metal exoskeleton and eerie white light. He holds us with his extravagant virtuosity and his ability to create suspense through long sequences, yet the movie is meaningless for anyone with genuine moral curiosity. It appears to be a kind of blasphemous Christian allegory propounding a vicious doctrine.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/16/09.) (In wide release.)

BROKEN EMBRACES

The new Pedro Almodóvar film is a complicated business, with stories built inside one another and subplots leading off in furtive directions, like tunnels. We meet Harry Caine (Lluís Homar), a blind screenwriter and former director, who, when he is not undressing strangers in his apartment, is concocting screenplays with his assistant, Diego

TABLES FOR TWO
AUREOLE

HONORE BROWN

135 W. 42nd St. (212-319-1660)—For the office workers of Times Square, whose after-work options have long been limited to ESPN Zone, Jimmy's Corner, and places where the drinks are proper nouns, Aureole is a major quality-of-life improvement. It comes, as these things do, on the heels of bankers—Bankers of America, in this case, whose new skyscraper on Forty-second Street houses the restaurant, which, for twenty years, inhabited a brownstone on Sixty-first Street. At quitting time, the suits swarm the bar, palming Heinekens and Pinots, popping pork-belly sliders like pieces of popcorn, clogging up the footways with their laptop cases. It's all very corporate, in the best sense—smooth, genial, humming. This is T.G.I. Friday's, the midtown way. The fig-thyme Martini, delicious and embarrassing, is our Mudslide.

The bar is the place to hang out at Aureole, but there is also a barroom—which is basically the bar, with tables, chairs, and less terrific service—and, toward the back, a proper dining room. Lunch and dinner there are two very different experiences. In the afternoon, when the alternative is doing spreadsheets, a meal with a colleague feels decadent and lucky (five kinds of rolls!). Later, when the alternative is doing whatever you want with whomever you want to do it with, the room feels less like a hideaway and—with its copper-colored vases and sprays of tiger lilies—more like an autumnally inflected isolation chamber. Charlie Palmer, by now, is more C.E.O. than chef, and his food has a sugared, edgeless aspect that is maybe a little too lulling. The risotto, a bright-yellow mush of pumpkin, cranberries, walnuts, and prosciutto—it brings to mind creamed corn—has a Gerberesque quality. The shiitake-mushroom soup, poured over pork-and-shrimp dumplings, is pleasingly smooth, but it needs a jolt to transcend canned-goods territory. The "citrus juices" the menu promised would have done wonderfully.

Besides being sweet, the dishes can be awfully busy. The skate comes out with an absolutely perfect sear, but who notices when you've got red grapes and green olives on the same plate? (There's also broccoli rabe, pine nuts, and fregola pasta.) You wish that Palmer's food, before it went out at night, would take off one piece of jewelry. The daubs of quince, Mission figs (which were good poached in port but would have been so much better plain), and walnut-leaf curlicues—oh, yeah, and the piece of blue-cheese cheesecake they accompany—are almost more work than they're worth. Thank God it will eventually be Saturday. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner and Sundays for dinner. Entrées $19-$40; dining room prix fixe $84.)

—*Lauren Collins*

(Tamar Novas), or revisiting and recutting a movie that was taken out of his hands many years before. Much of the action is set in that time—the chronicle of a love affair between the director and his star (Penélope Cruz), the mistress of a jealous financier (José Luis Gómez). The two periods intersect, as so often in Almodóvar, via parents and children; Diego's mother and the financier's pushy son, it turns out, both have a substantial role to play. The clarity and sheen of the film are typically startling, and no living director is more expert in the weaving of matching details; this time, however, the lusts and disappointments of the characters come close to being smothered—and rendered strangely unmoving—by the surfeit of cleverness and cool. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (11/23/09) (In wide release.)

CANYON PASSAGE
The smell of death hangs heavy over the Edenic splendor of the Oregon landscape of Jacques Tourneur's 1946 Western. Dana Andrews stars as Logan Stuart, a smart, ambitious, disciplined, and wide-travelling trader who brings his best friend's fiancée (Susan Hayward) to the remote town where her betrothed, George Camrose (Brian Donlevy), a local banker, and his own fiancée, Caroline (Patricia Roc), live. There, he finds a thug (Ward Bond) who tried to rob him and whom he won't let forget it, as well as a rancher (Andy Devine) whose outpost is the heart of a growing settlement. Tourneur sets in motion a wide and complex range of subplots and side characters—including an inquisitive entertainer (Hoagy Carmichael), an icy saloon matron (Rose Hobart), and her rapacious cardsharp husband (Onslow Stevens)—that suggests a quasi-sociological attention to the fabric of frontier life. The endless drinking, gambling, gunplay, and battles with Indians blend with the eternal struggle for love and money to evoke a raw and violent culture that plays, in the year after the Second World War ended, as utterly contemporary; avoiding history and politics, Tourneur serves up, in a dreamlike Technicolor glow, a pastoral film noir.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Nov. 28.)

FANTASTIC MR. FOX
For his stop-motion adaptation of Roald Dahl's book—about a fox who steals from three grotesque farmers, who go to absurd lengths to capture him as he leads his family and friends on increasingly desperate adventures in order to survive—the director Wes Anderson, co-writing the script with Noah Baumbach, greatly amplified the story and its emotional spectrum. Mr. and Mrs. Fox (voiced by George Clooney and Meryl Streep)—he's a journalist, she's an artist—bring to life a view of marriage that's as bittersweet and insightful as that of any recent live-action movie, and their idiosyncratic son (Jason Schwartzman) is set up in a touching rivalry with his cousin (Eric Anderson, the director's brother). Visually, the movie is a wonder, with its profusion of detail and exquisitely focussed "performances" by the figurines, whom Anderson frames in images as precisely composed as those featuring actors in his live-action work. The voice performances are sparkling and apt; the adventure plot is realized with a scenographic splendor that's as understated as it is dazzling, and is also invested with a surprising moral weight. Though the emotional realms—and the philosophical twists—that Anderson evokes are unusually sophisticated for a children's film, its exuberance is a universal tonic.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS
Believe it or not, the U.S. Army used to contain a special unit that was devoted exclusively to the use of psychic power as a tool of war. That, at any rate, is the scoop dug up by Bob Wilton (Ewan McGregor), an eager reporter based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. En route to Iraq, he encounters a restive figure named Cassidy (George Clooney), who claims to have been a "Jedi Warrior"—a secret operative trained in mental combat. His reminiscences revolve around a man named Django (Jeff Bridges), who urged his super-recruits to run through walls and peer into the future. So clearly is this the comic heart of Grant Heslov's film that he gets stuck in a loop of flashbacks; these are so diverting (especially when Kevin Spacey rolls up as Django's nemesis) that they drain the fun from the adventures of Cassidy and the Wilton kid, which seem hapless and inconsequential by comparison. The script, by Peter Straughan, is adapted from a nonfiction book by the British journalist Jon Ronson, and it's no surprise that the leading men, with Clooney in good fettle, should relish the battle of deluded wits; yet the story, even if parts of it are provable, barely feels like a story at all, let alone a durable satire on military policy. It's more like a string of larks and skits, dangling in space, waiting for a plot to come along.—*A.L.* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE MESSENGER
Captain Tony Stone (Woody Harrelson), an Army lifer with a shaved head and a jaw like a stone jetty, and Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery (Ben Foster), a coiled, secretive Iraqi war hero, work together at what is surely the worst job in the armed forces: telling parents and spouses that a loved one has been killed in Iraq. There's an excruciatingly obvious but unavoidable irony here: the movie itself has taken on the unwelcome task of telling its audience what it doesn't want to hear—news of the way families get hit by an unending war. Yet it doesn't feel dutiful or solemn. This is a fully felt, morally alert, marvellously acted piece of work. Harrelson, with his eye-popping glare and acetylene voice, takes his usual wild-man character deep into melancholy and loneliness; the mesmerizing Foster, whose eyes seem to look inward and outward at the same time, eases the tense, guilty war hero back into life. The two form an uneasy, carousing friendship. The visits to the families are done with great delicacy, but great courage, too, and after a while we feel not like voyeurs but like participants. With a droopy, passive Samantha Morton—the movie's only weakness—as a widow whom the sergeant falls in love with. The director, Oren Moverman (a veteran of the Israeli Army), is clearly a whiz with actors. He co-wrote the script with Alessandro Camon.—*D.D.* (11/16/09) (In wide release.)

IL POSTO
Ermanno Olmi's 1961 melodrama blends satire and romance, social critique and aching sympathy into an analytical view of life in a modern city. Domenico (Sandro Panseri), the shy, sensible teen-age son of a working family from a rustic suburb of Milan, travels to the city to apply for a job with a large modern company. At lunch, he meets Antonietta (Loredana Detto), a young, smoky-voiced, raven-haired beauty who is in his group of applicants. Olmi's roving, curious camera picks up an extraordinary range of quiet inflections, gestures, hesitations, and glimmers of feeling from his amateur performers, watching attentively and lovingly as their inhibitions and embarrassments begin, ever so slightly, to curdle into life-worn bitterness. Olmi's depiction of the ludicrous battery of "psychotechnical" tests to which the firm subjects its applicants suggests the dehumanizing grind of the work that awaits them at the jobs they covet. The contrast of Domenico's Old World family life with the newfangled burdens of urban routine—the trade-off of constraining tradition for isolating freedom—is nothing less than a tender lament for the human condition. In Italian.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Nov. 25.)

PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL "PUSH" BY SAPPHIRE
How you respond to Lee Daniels's film is likely to depend on two variables: first, to what extent the preposterous title will get your tongue in a twist, and second, whether or not you object to having extreme domestic abuse waved in front of your face. Gabourey Sidibe plays an obese, unhappy Harlem teen-ager named Clareece Jones; the task of the movie is to turn her nickname, Precious, from a wretched irony to a cause for pride—to surround her with people who will treasure her as she deserves. At the start, this seems a distant dream, since Precious is pregnant with her second child (fathered by her own father) and trapped at home with her monster of a mother (Mo'Nique)—a withering portrait of indolence and wrath. (Might conservatives latch onto the film as a cautionary tale about an obsessive reliance on welfare? If so, that hardly seems to be what Daniels intended.) Pre-

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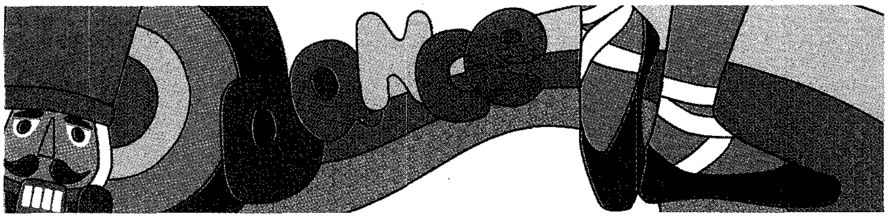


DANCE NOTES
HAND DANCE

Mime, the hand dance that we sometimes see in ballets, has two functions: it looks beautiful—like the steps, it's set to the music—and it advances the story. One of the loveliest (and longest) mime "speeches" on the stage today is that of the little Nutcracker-Prince in Balanchine's 1954 "**Nutcracker.**" Here it is, in short form. The Nutcracker and Marie have just arrived in the Land of the Sweets. The Sugarplum Fairy, who rules this domain, asks them what they're doing there. The Nutcracker holds out his arms to the dancers flanking him. ("Gather round.") He puts his hands to his ears, then to his chest. ("Listen to me, and hear a story from my heart.") He pushes his hands outward from his mouth. ("I will tell you everything.") He points to Marie; he lays his face on his hands and then sort of strokes the air. ("I was sleeping, and Marie comforted me.") He touches his ears, then his eyes; he skitters around, with his fingers wiggling at his mouth. ("I heard and then saw mice, with whiskers.") He marches forward. ("I rallied my troops.") He points offstage and circles his head with his finger. ("Suddenly the Mouse King appeared, wearing a crown.") He brandishes an imaginary sword. ("I fought him.") He points to Marie, then to his shoe, and does a sort of throw. ("Marie hurled her slipper at him.") He turns forcibly to the side and plunges the air sword forward again. ("The king turned toward her, and I killed him.") He raises his arms high. ("This was our victory.") He points to her, then to himself, then to the whole stage. ("She saved me, and our land. Now I have told you everything.") The fact that this is performed, with both precision and feeling, by a child, maybe eleven years old (taught by Garielle Whittle, the children's coach at New York City Ballet), makes it all the more moving. And he wears a pink suit and a pair of gleaming black shoes; he looks like something just bought in an expensive Parisian toy store. The audience goes nuts.

—*Joan Acocella*

KARI MODEN

cious finds hope in an alternative-school program, where she meets the beautiful and saintly—not to say implausible—figure of Blu Rain (Paula Patton). The tonal blend of damp-eyed fantasy and grueling, closeup brutishness is at once morally suspect and highly effective in its manipulations; what rescues the story from the brink of the gothic is the poise and purpose of its leading performers—including Mariah Carey, no less, who is almost unrecognizable in her role as a social worker.—*A.L.* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE ROAD
It's hard to say how Cormac McCarthy's celebrated novel should have been done as a movie—or whether it should have been done at all. For most of the film, we watch Viggo Mortensen, as The Man, and Kodi Smit-McPhee, as The Boy, walk through a dichromatic gray-brown post-apocalyptic landscape, peopled only by a few survivors (some of them cannibals feasting on human captives). The grimly punitive monotony of the leafless, colorless, humorless production may fool some people into thinking it's art. With the golden Charlize Theron, as The Man's wife (seen in a flashback to better days), and Robert Duvall, as a bitter old coot waiting to die. Shot in a wrecked industrial landscape near Pittsburgh. Screenplay by Joe Penhall. Directed by John Hillcoat.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

SMALL CHANGE
For François Truffaut, anything having to do with children is deeply personal, including the title of his 1976 feature, "L'Argent de Poche," better translated as "pocket money," which comes into play as a symbol of the parental care and trust at the heart of the movie. Truffaut's seriocomic view of the family and social lives of children, from toddlers to teens, growing up in the provincial town of Thiers tends toward the sentimental and the romantic, including a famous ten-story fall from which a boy rises unscathed to a round of first dates and first kisses. But the story revolves around a neglected child, Julien (Philippe Goldmann), and his caring teacher (Jean-François Stévenin) who had been a neglected child himself. Truffaut, whose own childhood had been rough and who had scathingly satirized the school system in "The 400 Blows," here looks even more coldly at child abuse and depicts his view of a nation turned progressive and liberal—owing to those who, like himself, were victims of old-school ways. In French.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; Nov. 25-Dec. 1.)

2012
One day Roland Emmerich will take a breather and give us a modest, thinly peopled costume drama in which, at the climax, somebody drops a teacup, but that day has not yet dawned. For now, the maker of "Godzilla" and "The Day After Tomorrow" remains intent on disaster, in every sense. The new film stars John Cusack (wearing the distracted look of an actor who badly wishes he were somewhere else), as an unsuccessful author with a failed marriage behind him; as luck would have it, therapy is on hand, in the shape of a catastrophic shift in the earth's crust, which, while slaying millions and flooding large portions of the globe, will nonetheless enable him to hug his beloved (Amanda Peet) once more. The special effects, which demand that mortal peril be evaded by the narrowest of squeaks, and which culminate with the launching of life-saving arks in the Himalayas, manage both to overbear and underwhelm. As in other Emmerich movies, the script seems to be poorly translated from the Martian, and even distinguished actors—including Thandie Newton, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and (as the American president) Danny Glover—are left to flounder in the mess.—*A.L.* (11/23/09) (In wide release.)

THE WILD PARROTS OF TELEGRAPH HILL
When he was a penniless San Francisco musician, Mark Bittner, the hero of this documentary, became a self-taught parrot authority and bonded with the species. The title flock, all escaped pets, now roams free, and the birds make fabulous subjects. Whether in flight or in repose, they appear to be choreographing their own lives. And as in any great dance film, they charge each of their moves with ritual and emotion. Bittner articulates the message of his experience—that there's a Zen oneness to the universe—without pretension or sanctimony. He views the birds as part of a colorful Bay Area tribe that acquired squatter's rights in a magic city. The director, Judy Irving, pays tribute to their vitality and hardiness without sentimentalizing them—she shows them engaging in savage fights and turning on the weakest members in the flock. When that happens, or when they're sick or failing, Bittner steps in to protect the victims, taking them into his cottage. The unruly life and outlandish color these parrots bring into the city proves hard to resist, not least because Irving always puts her camera in the right spot, then lets us savor what she finds there.—*Michael Sragow* (IFC Center; Nov. 26-29.)

Also Playing

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: In wide release. **DEFAMATION:** In limited release. **FOUR SEASONS LODGE:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Essential Cinema." Nov. 28 at 8: "L'Âge d'Or" (1931, Luis Buñuel). ♦ Nov. 29 at 3:15: Films by Charlie Chaplin, Program 1, including "Dough and Dynamite" (1914). ♦ Nov. 29 at 5: Films by Chaplin, Program 2, including "Police" (1916). ♦ Nov. 29 at 7: Films by Chaplin, Program 3, including "One A.M." (1916).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Liv Ullmann. All films are in Swedish. Nov. 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Shame" (1968, Ingmar Bergman). ♦ Nov. 26-27 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Persona" (1966, Bergman). ♦ Nov. 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Hour of the Wolf" (1966, Bergman). ♦ Nov. 29 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "Scenes from a Marriage" (1973, Bergman). ♦ Nov. 30 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Saraband" (2003, Bergman).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 25-Dec. 3 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Mr. Hulot's Holiday" (1953, Jacques Tati).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Italian Neo-Realism." Nov. 25 at 2 and 6:30: "Il Posto" (†). ♦ Nov. 25 at 4:30 and 8:30: "Salvatore Giuliano" (1962, Francesco Rosi; in Italian). ♦ "Celebrating Chekhov." All films are in Russian. Nov. 27 at 3 and 7:20, Nov. 28 at 3:20 and 7:20, Nov. 29 at 2:40 and 7:10, Nov. 30 at 1:15, and Dec. 1 at 3:15: "Ward No. 6" (2009, Karen Shakhnazarov). ♦ Nov. 27 at 1, Nov. 30 at 9:15, and Dec. 1 at 1:15: "The Seagull" (Yuli Karasik, 1970). ♦ Nov. 27 at 5:15, Nov. 29 at 12:30, and Nov. 30 at 7:10: "Uncle Vanya" (1970, Andrei Konchalovsky). ♦ Nov. 27 at 9:30: "An Unfinished Piece for Player Piano" (1977, Nikita Mikhalkov). ♦ Nov. 28 at 1 and Nov. 30 at 3: "Chekhov's Motifs" (2002, Kira Muratova). ♦ Nov. 28 at 5:30, Nov. 29 at 9:15, and Nov. 30 at 5:20: "The Lady with the Dog" (1960, Iosif Kheifits). ♦ Nov. 28 at 9:30 and Nov. 29 at 5: "The Shooting Party," a.k.a. "The Accident" (1978, Emil Loteanu).

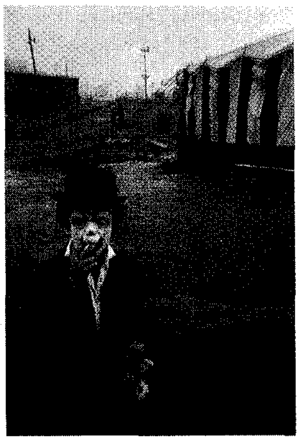
FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 22: The films of François Truffaut. Dec. 1 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Story of Adèle H." (1975, François Truffaut).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. Nov. 25-Dec. 1 (call for showtimes): "Small Change" (†). ♦ Nov. 26-29 at 11 A.M.: "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill" (†). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 25-28: "Brazil" (1985, Terry Gilliam). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Dec. 1 at 8: "How to Fold a Flag" (2009, Michael Tucker and Petra Epperlein).

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BRIGHT EYE

The photographer Bruce Davidson is having a well-deserved moment. At the age of seventy-six, he has two exhibitions running concurrently, and a new, three-volume survey of his fifty-year career. The range, dedication, and audacity of that career are the focus of the show at Wolkowitz, where contemporary prints, some quite large, sketch a loose trajectory from the circus (1958) to the subway (the early eighties). Along the way, Davidson rode with the Freedom Riders, hung out with a Brooklyn gang called the Jokers, and shot the L.A. scene with acerbic wit. He also spent two years in the late sixties photographing the residents on a notorious block of East 100th Street, the subject of his show at Greenberg. The prints are small, vintage, and framed and arranged just as they were for Davidson's first MOMA exhibition, in 1970. The intimate scale of the work is just right for these unsentimental but deeply empathetic portraits of junkies, teen-age couples, and families who trusted a concerned photographer with their tough and fragile lives.

—*Vince Aletti*



BRUCE DAVIDSON, "CIRCUS (SMOKING CIGARETTE)" (1958)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Nov. 25 and Nov. 27 at 1:30: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ "Best Years: Going to the Movies, 1945-46." Nov. 25 and Nov. 27 at 4:30: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1946, Jean Renoir). ♦ Nov. 25 at 7 and Nov. 30 at 4:30: "Stage Door Canteen" (1943, Frank Borzage). ♦ Nov. 28 at 2: "The True Glory" (1945, Carol Reed and Garson Kanin) and "Two Down and One to Go" (1945, Frank Capra). ♦ Nov. 28 at 4: "Canyon Passage" (†). ♦ Nov. 29 at 5: "The North Star" (1943, Lewis Milestone). ♦ The films of Tim Burton. Nov. 25 at 8: "Sleepy Hollow" (1999). ♦ Nov. 27 at 8: "Planet of the Apes" (2001). ♦ Nov. 28 at 8: "Big Fish" (2003). ♦ Nov. 29 at 2:30: "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" (2005). ♦ Nov. 29 at 5:30: "Corpse Bride" (2005). ♦ Nov. 30 at 8: "Sweeney Todd" (2008). ♦ "Nuts and Bolts: Machine Made Man." Nov. 27 at 3:30: "Alphaville" (1965, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 27 at 8: "Star Trek: The Enemy Within" (1966, Leo Penn), introduced by Bob Fingerman.

READINGS AND TALKS

BOOKS OF WONDER
Leading children's-book authors, illustrators, and other related parties—including Jerry Pinkney, Leo and Diane Dillon, Art Spiegelman, Françoise Mouly, Charles Santore, Laura Cornell, Holly Hobbie, Brett Helquist, and John Rocco—gather to discuss their latest books, in advance of the holiday season. (18 W. 18th St. Nov. 28 at noon.)

THE HALF KING
The writers Heidi Julavits, Sean Wilsey, and Daphne Beal join Liz Welch for a reading from "The Kids Are All Right," a memoir Welch and her sister Diana wrote, with help from their other siblings, Dan and Amanda, about their childhood and the splitting of their family after the death of their parents. (505 W. 23rd St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 30 at 7.)

"POEMS & PINTS"
The Poetry Society of America and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's monthly series at Fraunces Tavern continues, with readings by Ron Padgett and Katha Pollitt. (54 Pearl St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. Dec. 1 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BIG APPLE CIRCUS
Manhattan's one-ring wonder is back for the season. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. For more information, visit www.bigapplecircus.org. Through Jan. 18.)

"WALK OFF THE TURKEY"
On the Saturday following Thanksgiving, this annual eleven-mile trek, from South Ferry to the Little Red Lighthouse along Manhattan's West Side, is the perfect chance to relieve one's mind (and hips) of those extra glasses of Pinot Noir and third helpings of sweet potatoes. (Nov. 28, starting at 10 A.M. For more information, visit www.shorewalkers.org.)

"A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION"
Lake Wobegon comes to the big city as Garrison Keillor brings his radio show to Town Hall. There are seven performances, half of which will be broadcast live (those on Saturdays, which start at 5:45; the Friday shows start at 8), with special guests, satirical skits, musical interludes, and pun-soaked storytelling. On Nov. 28, the musicians are Karan Casey and Sara Watkins. On Dec. 4 and Dec. 5, it's the Punch Brothers and Heather Masse. Dec. 11 belongs to the Assad Brothers and Connie Evingson. Dec. 12 features Yo-Yo Ma, the Assad Brothers, and Connie Evingson. And on Dec. 18 and Dec. 19, Norah Jones and Madeleine Peyroux have the honors. (123 W. 43rd St. 212-307-4100.)

BUSHWICK BOOK CLUB
Books inspire many things: movies, plays, religions, and even political platforms. Less frequently, they inspire songs (Kate Bush's "Wuthering Heights," Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit"). For the past year, the Bushwick Book Club, which meets monthly, has addressed that deficiency by choosing a bill of songwriters to compose songs prompted by a chosen book, ranging from "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" to "The Origin of Species." In celebration of its one-year anniversary, the Book Club offers a best-of performance highlighting the year's most inspired tunes. Songwriters include Dan Costello, Dibson T. Hoffweiler, Phoebe Kreutz, Ben Krieger, Corn Mo, and the club's founder, Susan Hwang. (Goodbye Blue Monday, 1087 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-453-6343. Dec. 1 at 8.)

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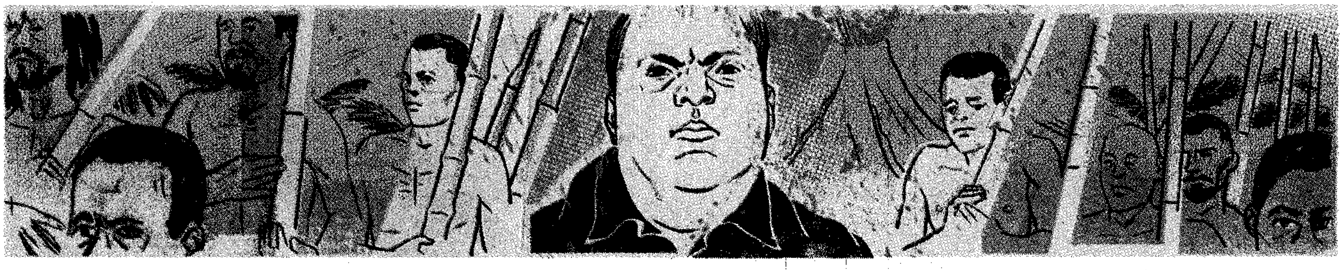
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



EDEL RODRIGUEZ

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
VOLCANIC FLOW
Dec. 3-13

Mike Daisey performs his latest monologue, "The Last Cargo Cult," which looks at the financial crisis through the story of a people living at the base of the Mt. Yasur volcano, in the South Pacific. Daisey's wife, Jean-Michele Gregory, directs, at the Public. (212-967-7555.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
WHITE NIGHTS
Dec. 5-6

The Baryshnikov Arts Center frequently invites big-name groups into its chic and intimate space. The Russian piano phenom Denis Matsuev and his Crescendo Music Festival players offer two programs, one of classical music (including Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2), the other of jazz. (212-868-4444.)

NIGHT LIFE
SEASONAL STOMP
Dec. 12

Michael Arenella and his Dreamland Orchestra join the George Gee Swing Orchestra at the Green Building, a new event space in an old factory in Gowanus, Brooklyn, for "The Winter Ball," a night of music, dancing, and other festivities. (www.dreamlandorchestra.com.)

MOVIES
MR. TATI'S HOLIDAYS
Dec. 18-Jan. 12

No comedy director has a more original or instantly recognizable technique than Jacques Tati, who made only six features, between 1949 and 1974, but remains enormously influential, both for his filmmaking and for his distinctive performance style. MOMA's retrospective presents new 35-mm. prints of his features, as well as short films he directed and other films in which he appeared. (212-708-9480.)

ART
CZECH POINT
Jan. 29-May 9

Since the nineteen-fifties, the reclusive photographer Miroslav Tichý, now in his eighties, has been taking pictures, mostly of women, in the small Czech town of Kyjov, using cameras cobbled together from salvaged trash. The International Center of Photography exhibits some one hundred of these images. (212-857-0000.)

"The Last Cargo Cult," at the Public.

Free ice skating.
Happy Holidays from Citi.

Admission to ice skating is always free at Pond, NY
in Bryant Park. Now through Jan 24.

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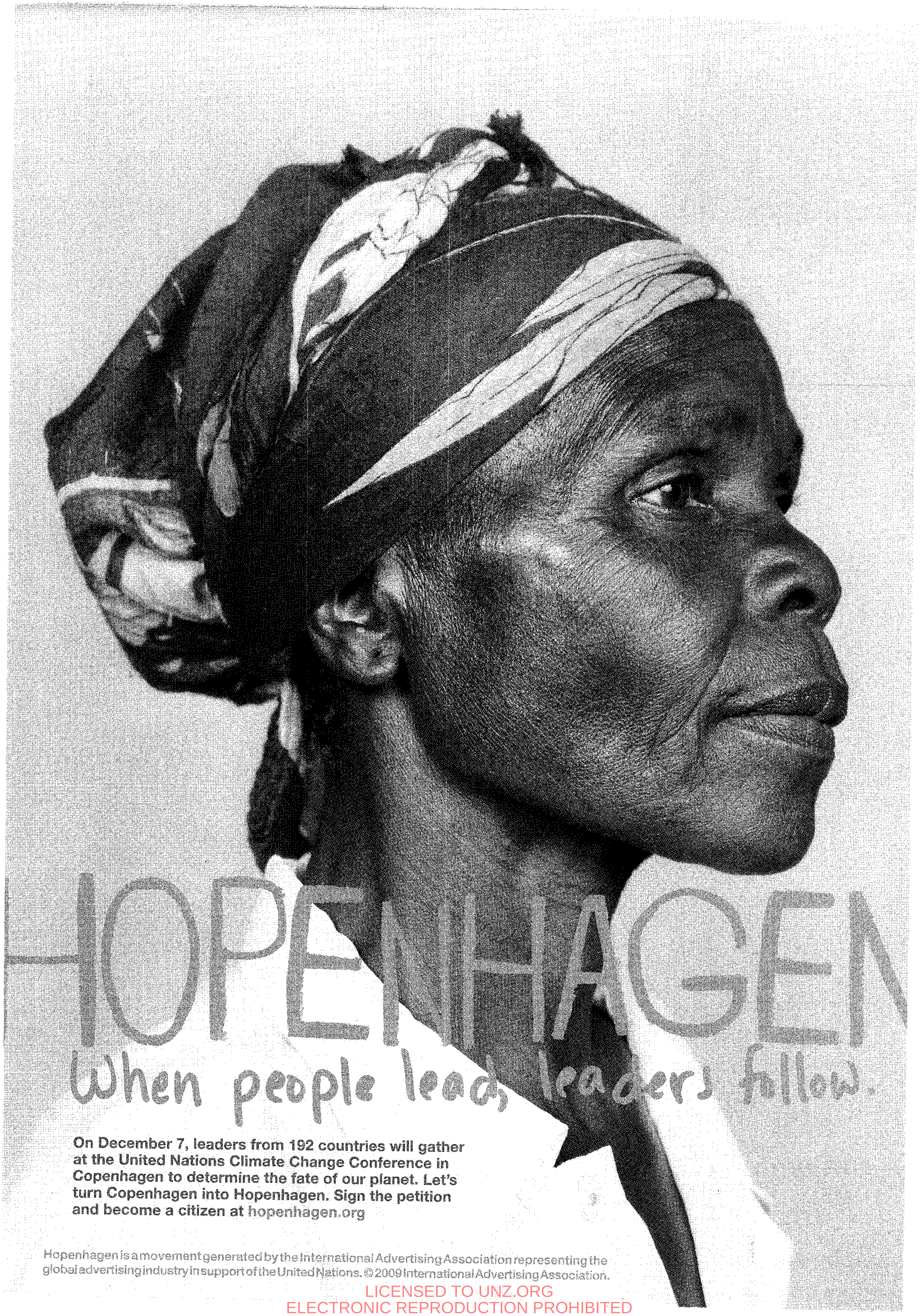
HOPENHAGEN
When people lead, leaders follow.

On December 7, leaders from 192 countries will gather at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen to determine the fate of our planet. Let's turn Copenhagen into Hopenhagen. Sign the petition and become a citizen at hopenhagen.org

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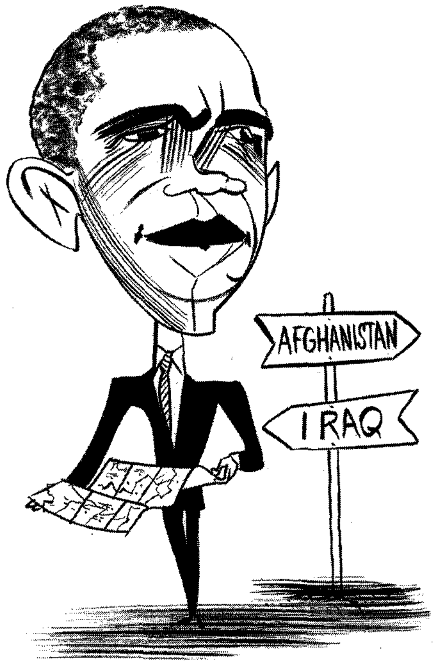
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE FIFTH WAR

In the sixty-four years since V-J Day, the United States has fought five wars big enough to be styled "major." Two of these, Vietnam (1962-75, by the most common reckoning) and Iraq (2003-11, with any luck), were conceived in sin. Their beginnings were fatally compromised by deceptions that congealed into lies, abetted by profound geostrategic misjudgments. In Vietnam, illusions piled on illusions. The Tonkin Gulf incident was not even an incident, since an incident, to be an incident, has to occur. The fear that Communism would spread throughout Asia and beyond if it was not stopped in Vietnam turned out to be groundless; so did the belief that the other side was motivated more by totalitarian ideology than by national feeling. The Iraq War, too, was midwifed by falsehoods and follies: the falsehoods that the Baghdad regime possessed "weapons of mass destruction" and that Saddam Hussein's was a hidden hand behind Al Qaeda and the attacks of September 11, 2001; the follies that the war would be a "cakewalk" and, most seductively, that it would "transform" the Middle East. In both wars, our enemy was only sometimes a conventional army; as often, if not more so, it was an elusive guerrilla force that was frequently indistinguishable from the civilian population.

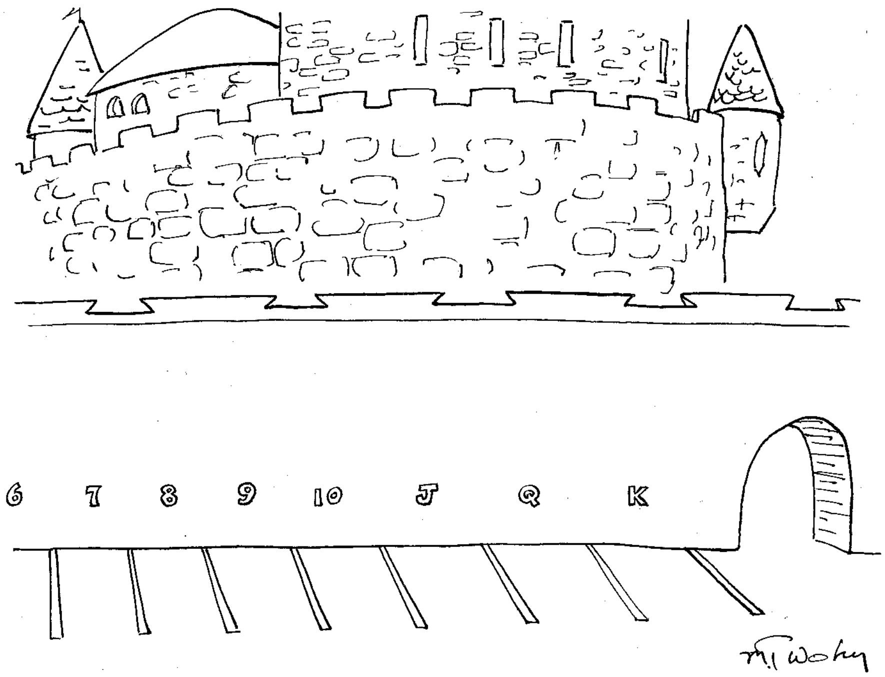
Another two of our five big-scale wars, Korea (1950-53) and the Gulf War (1991), were legitimate in their origins and (by the standards of mechanized slaughter) scrupulous in their execution. The Korean "police action"—a euphemism, but one that carried real meaning at a time when hopes for a global order of international law were fresh and high—was fought with the sanction (and partly under the flag) of the United Nations. The Gulf War, too, had the sanction of the U.N. and its Security Council. Four decades apart, the two wars shared many features, starting with the moral and temporal clarity of their beginnings. Both were fought in response to armed aggression across international borders. In both, the American Administration resisted powerful political pressures to expand its objective to include the destruction and conquest of the regime responsible for the original aggression. And, after both, the cessation of hostilities along the restored borders has held, even if its form does not quite deserve the name of peace.



The war in Afghanistan scrambles the familiar categories so thoroughly that the customary rubrics for making judgments don't fit. As in Korea and the Gulf, we went to war to punish an unmistakable act of aggression—this time on our own soil. But the aggressor was not a state; it was a band of freelance fanatics protected by a state. The goals of our response were as clear as the morning of September 11th: to call to account those who sent the murderers and the government that harbored them. Our action had the backing of NATO, which, for the first time in its history, activated the provision of its charter that declares an attack against one an attack against all. The support of the "international community" was nearly unanimous. Even Iran lent a hand.

During the election campaign, Barack Obama and the Democrats put forth a story—a "narrative," as political reporters now like to say—about two wars. According to the story, the "good" war was the war in Afghanistan. But it failed to fully achieve its principal goal because at the crucial moment the Bush

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



Administration, in its obsession with Saddam, diverted resources and attention to Iraq—a "bad" war. The diversion allowed Bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban leadership to slip the noose at Tora Bora—a guerrilla Dunkirk. "I don't oppose all wars," an Illinois state senator had famously told a rally on the very afternoon in October, 2002, that the Iraq War Resolution was introduced in Congress. "I'm opposed to dumb wars." Iraq was a dumb war; Afghanistan was, or could be, a smart one.

There was considerable truth in the narrative. But it contained an almost subliminal suggestion that somehow the clock could be turned back—that the events of the Afghanistan war's first months could be replayed, this time with a better outcome. When Obama moved into the White House, he brought the narrative with him. In August, at a Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, he said of the conflict, "This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity." By October, he had ordered in thirty-four thousand more troops, doubling the overall American deployment in Afghanistan. But he had also begun an intensive review of the entire policy.

On Armistice Day, at a full-scale meeting of his national-security team, Obama was presented with four options. According to what little has leaked out from under the closed doors, all four options called for more American troops, from ten thousand at the lower end to forty thousand at the upper. Though some in the Administration favor a smaller military footprint instead of a larger one, that was not among the choices offered to the President. For this fifth war, there was no fifth option.

The President rejected all four. He has apparently decided against anything like a quick drawdown, but he wants a map that plots an eventual way out, not just an abundance of ways further in. As he told an interviewer, there can be no "indefinite stay," no "permanent protectorate." And he has questions he would like answered.

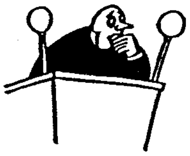
So do the rest of us. Does it make sense, for example, to spend lives and treasure trying to eradicate "safe havens" in Afghanistan when Al Qaeda has so many other—well, options, from Sudan to Hamburg? Will a bigger, longer, and presumably bloodier occupation advance or retard the ultimate aim of discouraging Islamist terrorism? Will adding American troops—at a million dollars a year per soldier—encourage Afghans to fight for themselves or prompt them to leave the fighting to us? Can Afghanistan's nominal government, with its President elected by fraud and its recent rating as the second most corrupt on earth, be finessed or somehow remade?

The sum we are already spending annually on Afghanistan is greater than its gross domestic product. Are there nonmilitary ways we could deploy that sum which would advance our goals as efficaciously? Would even forty thousand additional troops suffice for anything resembling the ambitious nation-building program that General Stanley McChrystal, the top military commander in Afghanistan, has proposed? (Counterinsurgency theory suggests that it would take more than ten times that many; would forty—or ten, or twenty—thousand be only a first installment?) Any counterinsurgency campaign, we're told, requires a very long commitment. Is the voluntary association of democracies called NATO, organized to deter war more than to wage it, capable of sustaining a twenty or thirty years' war? For that matter, does the United States—a decentralized populist democracy struggling with economic decline and political gridlock—have that capacity? And what about Pakistan?

The President has come under heavy criticism for taking the time to ponder the imponderables. "The urgent necessity," a respected Washington columnist wrote the other day, "is to make a decision—whether or not it is right." Really? Does the columnist suppose that a country unable to find the patience for weeks (even months) of thinking could summon the stamina for years (even decades) of killing and dying? What Obama seems to have discovered is that this is no longer the war that began eight years ago. That war was an act of retribution and prevention. But now who are we punishing? What are we preventing? The old narrative is broken. The fifth war is becoming a sixth.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

THE BENCH
POST-PIZZA



Sometime in the next few months, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four confederates will be indicted in Manhattan federal court, and the case will arrive at a turning point: the designation of the judge who will preside over their trial. The selection is usually made by a draw from a wheel in the office of the court clerk, but prosecutors have also been known to try to game the system by telling the clerk that a new case is factually related to an older one that had been presided over by a favored judge. In any event, the judicial assignment is sure to be daunting and lengthy. There will be no shortage of advice for the putative Lance Ito of Ground Zero, but the winner of this particular derby might be well advised to pay a visit to Pierre N. Leval.

"I've had the same mailing address for almost my whole career," Leval said the other day in his chambers, on Pearl Street. A former Assistant United States Attorney in the Southern District courthouse, Leval, who is seventy-three, was named to the federal trial bench by Jimmy Carter in 1977 and to the court of appeals by Bill Clinton in 1993. He took senior status, with a reduced caseload, in 2002, but he continues to hear cases as a judge on the Second Circuit. Still, for all those years around Foley Square, he is best known for presiding over one of the most consequential trials in federal history: the Pizza Connection case.

The trial concerned a diaspora of Sicilian heroin entrepreneurs who operated out of various slice-and-Coke emporiums in locations ranging from Queens to rural Illinois. (Al Dente's, in Forest Hills, remains open, under new management.) "The problem in the case was that the government didn't have a lot of actual heroin to show the jury," Leval said. "So the case was mostly a series of wiretaps of phone calls where the callers talked about heroin, and then F.B.I. agents testifying about how they followed the defendants around from place to place. Most of the time, it was boring." He added, "People also got murdered from time to time in that case."

The trial began in October, 1985, with twenty-two defendants and their lawyers arrayed in Courtroom No. 506. In the middle of the trial, one of the defendants, Gaetano (Tommy) Mazzara, who was out on bail, was found stuffed in a garbage bag on a street corner in Brooklyn. (Mazzara's pizzeria was called Pizza d'Oro and was in New Jersey.) The jury was told only that he had died.

The prosecution, which was led by Louis Freeh, who went on to be the director of the F.B.I., estimated that the trial would take six or seven months. But the government's case alone took about a year to present. "I'm sure there are other judges who would have tried the Pizza Connection case faster than I did, but you have to draw a balance between dealing patiently with things that should be dealt with patiently, and allowing yourself to be bogged down," Leval said. In all, the trial took seventeen months—the longest criminal trial in the history of the Southern District of New York—and it concluded, fittingly, with gunfire. On the night of February 11, 1987, when defense lawyers were giving their summations, another defendant, Pietro Alfano (whose pizzeria was situated in Oregon, Illinois), was shot three times on the way out of Balducci's. "After that, several of the other defendants asked to have their bail revoked and go inside," Leval said. Alfano survived and later pleaded guilty. All the defendants but one either were convicted or pleaded guilty.

The other day, Leval was wearing a mismatched checked shirt and striped tie, and he affected disdain for quotidian matters like his own safety. "Toward the end of the trial, I stopped taking the subway and let the marshals drive me," he said. "They kill judges all the time in Sicily, and I was counting on the idea of 'When in Rome,' you know?" Still, he does not underestimate the challenge posed by the 9/11 conspiracy case. (Among the smaller hindrances is that the main court building, at 40 Foley Square, the site of all the big local federal trials, from the Pizza Connection and Martha Stewart to the Rosenbergs, is in the midst of a renovation; K.S.M. will likely face justice in the newer Moynihan Courthouse, next door.)

Leval has confidence in the ability of the American judicial system to dispense justice even in a case as difficult as this one. "You have to be very careful in jury selection, ask the right questions, identify the jurors who will be fair," he said. "Judges and juries can be protected. I don't see any reason why the system can't handle this case."

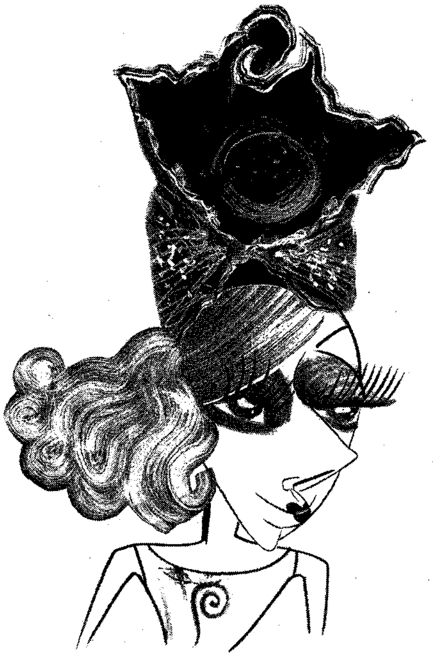
—*Jeffrey Toobin*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
CELEBROMATIC

The other day, Francesco Vezzoli, an Italian artist known for his meta-spectacles—an advertisement for a fake perfume called Greed, directed by Roman Polanski; a trailer for a fictional remake of Gore Vidal's "Caligula," with him and Courtney Love sharing the title role—turned up in the offices of the architect Frank Gehry with a Prada shopping bag. "Hi, kiddo," Gehry—small, buoyant, gnomish—said. (They go back.) Out from the bag came a hat stand, on which a large silver leather headdress brooded like an alien hen: Gehry had designed it, at Vezzoli's behest, and Prada had fabricated it, for the avant-garde, hat-friendly pop star Lady Gaga to wear during a performance with dancers from the Bolshoi Ballet, to benefit the financially troubled Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Los Angeles.

"Yee-hoo!" Gehry squealed. "Lookie this! Wow! I wouldn't wear it, but—has she tried it on yet?" (She had not.) "I would open it up a little," he said, pulling back the silver wings to reveal a glittery translucent bauble, like a giant superball or an all-seeing eye. He touched it. "Can that be more silver?" Gehry said that he had done the initial drawing on his iPhone, which an assistant then produced: a violet scribble with a black-and-blue iris at the center. "Since I've never designed a hat before, I was afraid she wouldn't be able to walk," he said. "I did have an idea that involved people with sticks holding it up, walking behind her. I didn't know how far I could go with this thing."

Vezzoli's spectacle, "Ballet Russes Italian Style (The Shortest Musical You Will Never See Again)," went up the following Saturday. That afternoon, Lady Gaga rehearsed in a tent, which had been erected for the gala on the street in front of the museum—it was draped in red satin and velvet and displayed a movie-palace marquee out front. ("It's disco-Kremlin in the middle of the freeway," Vezzoli said. "It's beyond kitsch. It's literally like a night club for the orgies of Communist plutocrats.") She took the stage slowly, in the manner of a boozy granny. It might have been her shoes: spike-heel black patent-leather lace-up dominatrix boots, paired with ripped fishnets, a studded leather vest, a black leotard slit to the navel, and sunglasses that never came off. Her hair was a tangle of white-blond cotton candy streaked with pink. It matched the piano—pink, with cobalt butterflies painted on it—customized by Damien Hirst. The Hirst piano was reminiscent of the bubble-filled piano she played on her last tour, which was based on a Hussein Chalayan dress.



Lady Gaga

Gaga gazed at the instrument. "Holy mother, that's unbelievable. Is it a Steinway?" she said. "Steinways are the best. The butterflies are so pretty." She played "Speechless," a song that would début that night, and, as the dancers twirled, the stage, like a mechanism in a child's jewelry box, began to rotate. When the song was over, she peered out into the darkened tent, tilting her head down so she could see over her shades. "Holy mother," she said again, and went to her tour bus.

Inside, Gaga, who is twenty-three and speaks with a prim grandeur that might have come from watching old movies, sank into a nubby upholstered seat. "I wear this all the time," she said, yanking closed her gaping leotard. "This is like my sweatpants." She rattled off her inspirations: Leigh Bowery, Klaus Nomi, David Bowie, Grace Jones. "It is that moment of fashion, that moment of performance, and that moment of music, combined with art and love, that makes what Gaga is all about," she said. She sprang up and surveyed her borrowed finery: the Gehry hat; a grayish satin dress with a skirt of chandelier crystals (designed by Vezzoli and Miuccia Prada, after the costume that Giorgio de Chirico made for Diaghilev's "Le Bal"); a brass-and-crystal mask, by Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin; a pair of tall clear plastic boots with black buttons up the side. "I helped design the shoes," Gaga said. "They're supposed to look like spats, and they're just under the knee, a bit more of a tea length." She said she felt at home in the world of contemporary art. "The objective is to always be making something that belongs in a museum. Even what I'm wearing right now."

Night fell, and the guests began to arrive: artists, politicians, actresses, the old, rich, concerned citizens of Los Angeles, and Wladimir Klitschko, the Ukrainian heavyweight champion. (They were, to Vezzoli's mind, the ultimate extras.) Teacups of borscht and tiny devilled quails' eggs went around on trays. Tavi Gevinson, a thirteen-year-old fashion blogger with a small, pale face and Mia Farrow hair, had flown in from Chicago and was dressed in Rodarte. (The Rodarte sisters were her babysitters for the night.) "God—Hamish!" she said, swooning a little when she saw Hamish Bowles, an editor at *Vogue*. "He's the coolest." At the dinner hour, Gevinson took her place, along with Gwen Stefani and Brad Grey, at the table of Dasha Zhukova, a twenty-eight-year-old Russian contemporary-art lover and oligarch's daughter who was an honorary co-chair of the event. (Roman Abramovich, another art-loving oligarch, is her partner and soon to be the father of her child.)

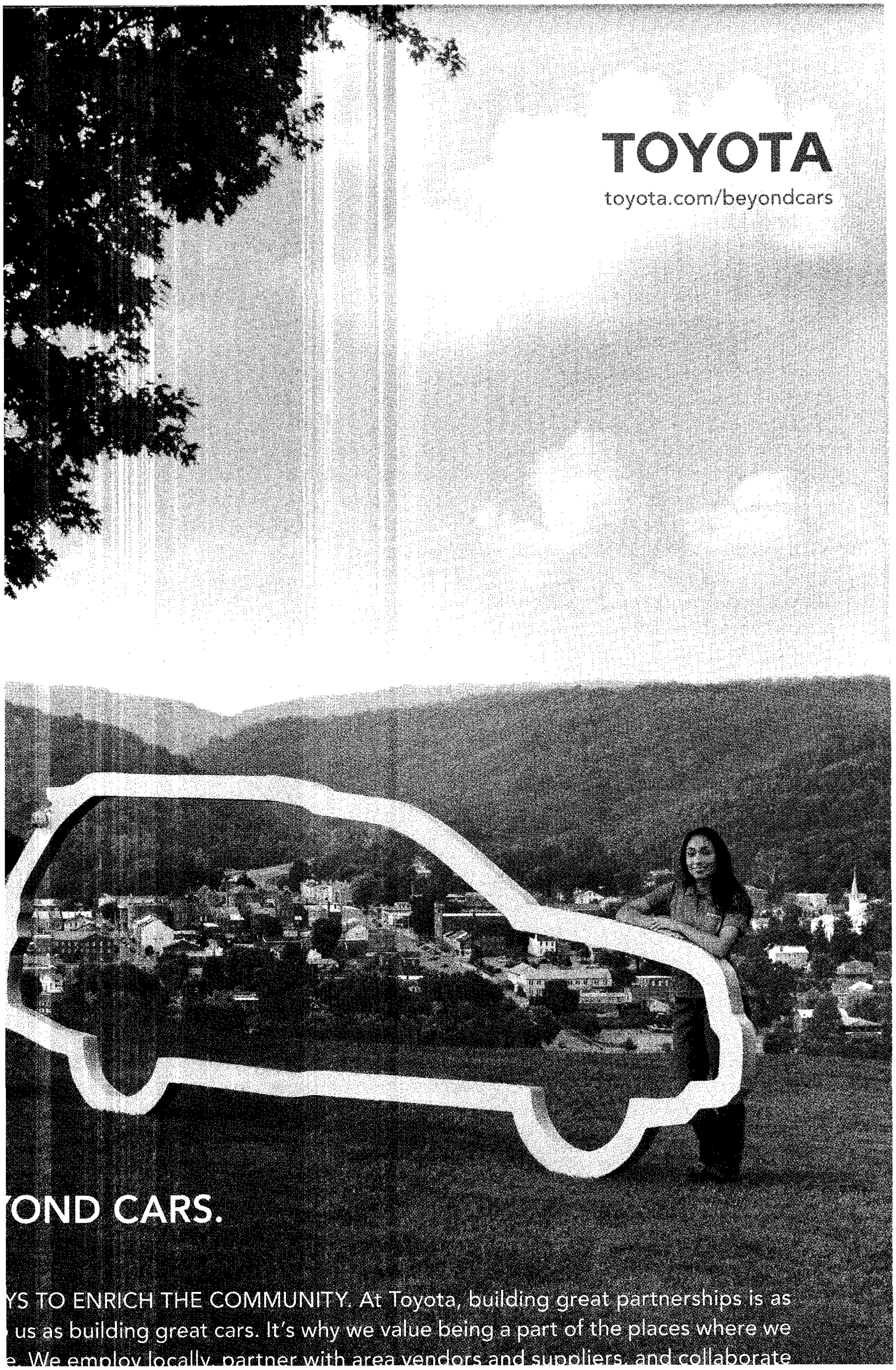
Performance art was on everybody's mind. Three girls in matching golden diadems—the heiresses Tatiana Santo Domingo, Eugenie Niarchos, and Margherita Missoni—proclaimed themselves a "visual art act." "We're a cross between the Spice Girls and Burning Man," Missoni said, dissolving in giggles. The blogger Perez Hilton, who says he is "Gaga's No. 1 fan," was wearing a black hoodie with glitter pinstripes, from American Apparel, and white sunglasses. "The public persona of me is so different from who I really am," he said, gesturing at his ensemble. "I wouldn't wear this, *Perez* would wear this. I don't wear sunglasses inside, *Perez* does. This is acting! It's also good because if I see Rachel Zoe or someone I don't want to look at I don't have to make eye contact." He paused, and took a swig of red wine. "She's here."

The spectacle went by in a flash. Perez sang along to "Speechless" in an otherwise hushed room. Gaga wore the Gehry hat all folded in on itself, a millinery version of Walt Disney Hall. ("She has a thing about showing her eyes—she doesn't like to—so she closed it up," Gehry said, over a miniature baked Alaska, afterward. "It's O.K.") The piano was auctioned off for four hundred and fifty thousand dollars to Larry Gagosian, Hirst's dealer, who was the other honorary co-chair of the event. (The gross receipts for the night were four million dollars.) After a while, Gaga reëmerged, hatless, with black lipstick daubed at the center of her mouth, the geisha way, looking—an effect of heavy makeup—as if someone had punched her in both eyes. "This is the most heady night of my life," she said, as Perez introduced her to Pharrell Williams, the musician and producer. "Whenever you start your next album, I would love to give you a mean up-tempo," Williams said. "I was probably the last one to get it, but, now that I got it, there's no other artist. It's not whether you have blue eyes or a fat ass or can rhyme—it's about a great performance, it's about a performer willing to be theatrical beyond."

—*Dana Goodyear*

DEPT. OF OVEREXPOSURE
NAKED TRUTH

Even the greatest art works can be revitalized by new technologies. As a result of carbon dating and infrared analysis, a painting once credited to an obscure nineteenth-century artist is believed to be a long-lost work of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Leonardo da Vinci. This year's Beatles remasters applied modern recording technology to the group's iconic albums. And then there's the epiphanic experience of watching "Road House," the 1989 bouncer/philosopher drama starring the late Patrick Swayze, on Blu-ray. Just ask Mr. Skin.

Mr. Skin, also known as Jim McBride, has spent the past decade overseeing his popular Web site of the same name, which meticulously catalogues nude scenes in films. Give McBride an actress's name, and he'll tell you when she lifted her shirt or dropped her trousers. For instance, Maureen McCormick, better known as Marcia Brady, of "The Brady Bunch": "There's a movie called 'Texas Lightning,' which came out in 1981," McBride said over the phone recently from Chicago, where his company is based. "At about the hour-and-four-minute mark, in a scene in a motel, a group of thugs pull down McCormick's top and you see both of her breasts." Or take Anne Hathaway. McBride said, "Three movies: 'Brokeback Mountain,' 'Havoc,' and 'Rachel Getting Married.'" Times are good for Mr. Skin. His Web site made a cameo in Judd Apatow's "Knocked Up," in 2007—Seth Rogen and his friends dreamed of launching a similar project, only to discover that McBride was already on the scene—and a new edition of the site's companion book, the "Skincyclopedia," comes out this month.

When McBride launched his site, in 1999, it was exclusively a VHS operation. "It had to be," he said, "because I didn't have a DVD player." As the business grew, VHS was supplanted by DVD, which offered better picture quality. In the past year, as the video industry has begun to shift to Blu-ray, the new high-definition format, Mr. Skin has had to rethink his entire modus operandi.

"Blu-ray quality is six times better than DVD," he said. "If you watch a movie on Blu-ray, something you thought was just a shadow will suddenly be revealed as a breast or a butt." He sighed. "'Road House,'" he said. "There's a scene at the hour-and-four-minute mark"—Mr. Skin has noticed that nudity tends to crop up more commonly at certain points in films, perhaps when audiences' attention is lagging—"where Patrick Swayze is sitting outside smoking a cigarette, and Kelly Lynch gets out of bed and starts to walk toward him. All the other times we saw this movie, on video or even DVD, you could only see her butt as she was walking toward him. When we were reviewing it on Blu-ray, we decided to get a closeup of her butt, and when we blew up the scene we could clearly see more. We had previously rated the movie as Breast and Buns, but we had to change it to Breast, Buns, and Bush." He went on, "Or take 'Fatal Attraction.' There's a scene where Glenn Close is rolling around on the bed with Michael Douglas. There's always been breast nudity visible, but on Blu-ray you can really make out even more."

McBride's content department—eight guys who spend their workweek capturing screen shots of any flash of flesh—is working hard to keep up with the new technology. "Studios are releasing about five or six Blu-ray titles a week," McBride said, "so we're able to be pretty comprehensive, at least so far. In 'Thunderball,' for example, there's a scene with the French actress Claudine Auger on a raft with Sean Connery, and the bottom of her bathing suit is askew. It's not visible to the naked eye, but it's obvious in the Blu-ray, so that film got immediately upgraded from No Nudity to Brief Nudity."

How much extra dishabille will Blu-ray eventually reveal? "Some nudity, as it turns out, is like a tree falling in the forest with no one around," McBride said. "If you've never seen it before, does it really exist? We're going to keep looking at all these movies as technology makes them better and better, and who knows? We may even discover something in 'The Sound of Music.' That would be the Holy Grail for me, to find a nude scene in a G-rated movie."

—*Ben Greenman*

THANKSGIVING TRAVEL UPDATE

DEN: Takeoff and landing delays now estimated at ten to eleven hours owing to F.A.A. balloon-hoax runway search sweeps.

BOS: Elderly and handicapped: Moving sidewalks are out of service owing to electricity cutoff; arrange piggyback to reach your gate by boarding time. Beware of unlicensed or "gypsy" piggyback carriers.

MIA: New airline regulations requiring all carry-on bags to fit into the forward seat-back pocket go into effect at noon on Thursday, November 26th.

Interstate I-95, New Haven-Providence: Expect delays as highway maintenance workers install signage for new No Occupancy and Too Many Occupants car lanes.

Moo Shu Bus Lines New York-to-Boston service: Expanded holiday schedule through Sunday, with hourly non-stop departures to Beijing, Shanghai, and Macao.

YQB: Bulletin: No bulletins. Canadian Thanksgiving is observed in early October.

LAX: Expect delays in viewing information on flight departure and arrival monitors in all major terminals owing to heavy Black Friday retail advertising content.

LGA standby passengers: All check-in and information desks are now Bun 'n' Java Quik-Karts. (Note: Gulp & Go Koffee Kash Koupons can no longer be honored.)

BUF: The U.S. side of Niagara Falls will be closed over the Thanksgiving holiday for annual coin-retrieval exercises.

BNA: Owing to airport security's new No Loitering policy in baggage-carrousel areas, baggage pickup is subject to conflict-related delays.

TUS: Departing passengers should pre-memorize the U.S. Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, and the Lord's Prayer to ease check-in bottlenecks as new interactive citizenship-quiz screening (see recent amendment to Patriot Act) becomes mandatory beginning at midnight on Wednesday, November 25th.

—*Bruce McCall*

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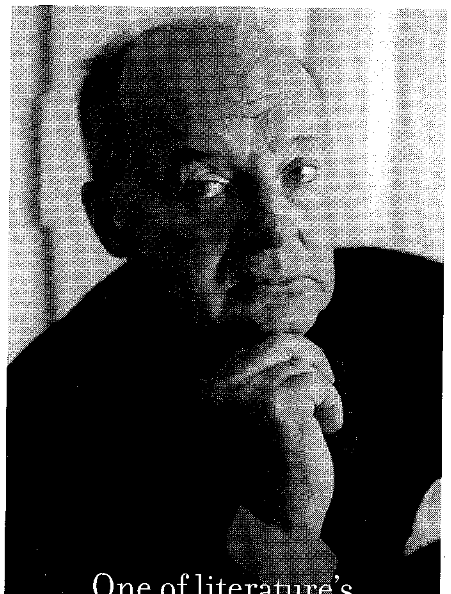
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beguile Nabokov
fans."
–Michiko Kakutani,
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**Independent on Sunday*

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THE SPORTING SCENE

DADDIES WIN

Can we love the Yankees now?

BY ROGER ANGELL

Let's begin with something special: feat first. On Sunday, October 4th, in the last game of the regular season, the visiting Yankees are trailing the home-team Tampa Bay Rays, 2–0, in the sixth, with nothing at stake. With a hundred and two wins in hand, the Yankees have long since clinched the American League East Divisional title, and will begin their post-season playoffs at Yankee Stadium on Wednesday, against either the Detroit Tigers or the Minnesota Twins. The Rays, American League champions a year ago, are in third place, eighteen games behind the Yanks, and can hardly wait to have their abysmal season end. Alex Rodriguez, the Yankees third baseman and celebrity slugger, is also thinking about the finish line. In some ways, this has been his worst season ever, beginning as it did with the revelation, in February, that he had used anabolic steroids from 2001 to 2003 while playing for the Texas Rangers. He apologized and expressed deep regrets to his fans but was not fined or suspended, since the violation occurred before penalties were in place. Early in March, A-Rod underwent arthroscopic surgery to repair a torn labrum in his right hip. He made a good recovery but did not return to the lineup until May 8th, when, on the first pitch of his first at-bat of the year, he smacked a three-run homer. He has done all right since then, batting .286, but his numbers are a little short. He needs two more home runs today to reach a respectable total of thirty, and seven more runs batted in to get to a hundred, the plateau he has attained, and then some, in thirteen of his sixteen years in the majors. (Two homers more will also raise his career total to five hundred and eighty-three, tying him with Mark McGwire for eighth on the lifetime list.) Well, O.K., Alex, but time's running out here. Coming up to bat against the right-hander Wade Davis, with two teammates on base, A-Rod hits a three-run homer. A little later but still in the same inning, with the Yanks now leading by 6–2 and the bases loaded, he steps in again against a different pitcher, Andy Sonnanstine, and delivers a grand slam. Rodriguez's seven R.B.I.s in a single inning is a new American League record (the all-time eight belongs to Fernando Tatis, a Cardinals outfielder, who hit two grand slams in one inning against the Dodgers on April 23, 1999), while his thirteenth year at the thirty-homers-plus-a-hundred-R.B.I.s level breaks a record he shared with Manny Ramirez, Jimmie Foxx, and Babe Ruth.

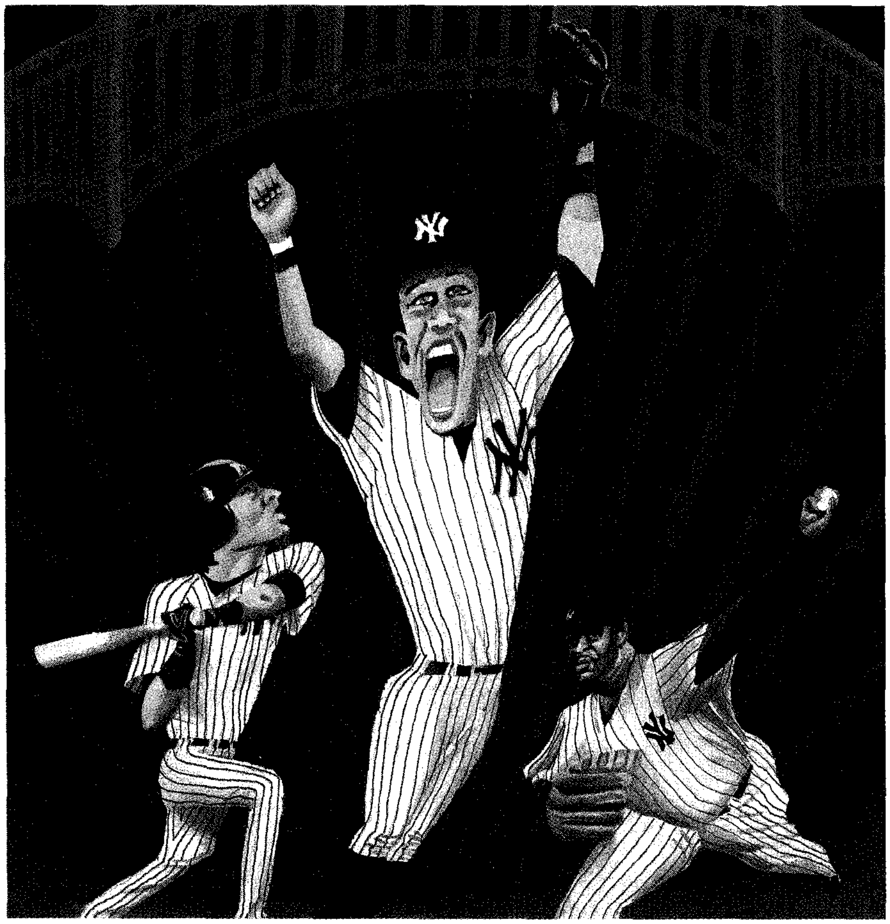
The Yankees, as we know, moved along from this Florida afternoon to eliminate the Twins in a three-game Divisional-series sweep, then put away the tough Los Angeles Angels in a thrilling six-game League Championship, and won their satisfying twenty-seventh World Championship, over the defending-champ Phillies, in six. Some of these late happenings will be visited here, but let's stay a moment longer with that inning in Tampa, which gained significance during the more celebrated games that followed. Rodriguez, despite his three Most Valuable Player awards, two of which had come since he joined the Yankees, in 2004, had suffered ungodly post-season difficulties at the plate, dating back to the fourth game of the 2004 A.L.C.S. Since then, he'd stranded thirty base runners in fifty-nine post-season at-bats, going oh for his last twenty-seven with runners on base. This string of high-pressure flops contributed to the Yankees' embarrassing failures to get past the first round of playoffs in 2005, '06, and '07 (they finished third last year, and went home), but his helplessness at the plate made you cringe more often than curse.

The slump was a favorite topic on sports blogs and call-in radio shows, and became another one of the uneasy or irritating things we knew about him, a rip to go along with his chilly relations with Derek Jeter; his Page Six affair with Madonna; his divorce; his salary (he's in the second year of a ten-year contract that paid him thirty-three million dollars this year, the most in baseball); the *Sports Illustrated* interview in which he claimed that people said bad things about him because he was good-looking and biracial, and made the most money; the story that he'd really wanted to play for the Red Sox; and, all along, his removed, disdainful manner and its closely accompanying air of desperately wishing to belong. As his old manager Joe Torre said, "When it comes to a key situation, he can't get himself to concern himself with getting the job done, instead of how it looks."

This year—well, this year he's been somebody else. Comfortably ensconced in the cleanup slot behind the switch-hitting newcomer Mark Teixeira, he endured fresh booings everywhere, hit some early game-tying or game-winning home runs, slid into and climbed out of an extended slump, passed Reggie Jackson on the all-time-homer list, and, most notably, said nothing much to the media and actually appeared happy at his work. His post-season paralysis vanished with two run-scoring singles in the first Divisional game against the Twins. He was the standout player in that series, and did not cease to deliver thereafter, batting .365 for the post-season while contributing six home runs, three of which tied games where the Yankees trailed, and another hit that he called the most important of his career. That inning in Tampa, he allowed at one point, had loosened him up.

I think A-Rod will always be a little beyond us. We can get used to his money more easily than to his outlandish talent and his physical gifts; standing near him in the dugout at times, I've had the impression that I'm within touching distance of a new species. The games this fall set him free, at least for now, and in the process released me from the ranks of sullen doubters. I've begun to think that if Alex Rodriguez—A-Rod, of all people—can come such a distance in one season then maybe baseball is coming out of its long funk after all.

Tickets of commiseration are issued here to heartbroken supporters of the Mets, Cubs, Cardinals, Red Sox, Rockies, Dodgers, Twins, etc., who failed to make it into or safely out of the October tournaments. No words of succor can mean much to Mets fans, whose ravaged Amazings lost Carlos Delgado, Jose Reyes, Carlos Beltran, and Johan Santana—the best of their best—to injuries, along with many others, for weeks and months of the schedule, and finished twenty-three games behind the Phillies. This time, the Mets' problems and psyche may require something more than better luck and the customary between-season signings and statements for them to reverse things—some fresh attitudes, and perhaps less conviction of their own wonderfulness. And I don't mean another manager.



Hideki Matsui, A-Rod, and C. C. Sabathia added up to happy yelling in the Bronx.

MARK ULRIKSEN

In any case, the sufferings of the Metsvolk are minor when compared with the harsh hand dealt to Tiger fans, whose team led the American League Central by seven games as late as September 6th and, day by painful day, allowed the margin to shrivel away. Many of the long-term ticket holders at Comerica Park are auto-workers, lifers on the Pontiac and Chrysler and Chevy assembly lines, who experienced horrific changes in their lives in the past few months and did not expect further anguish at the games. The lead disappeared on the final Saturday, when the Tigers lost still again and were caught by the Twins; both won on Sunday, necessitating a one-game playoff up at the Metrodome. The Tigers led, 3–1, early on, fell behind but tied it up, then took the lead again in the tenth only to be retied, and died, 6–5, in the bottom of the twelfth. Their manager, Jim Leyland, stood in the late going with one foot up on the step of the dugout and the same gaunt Dorothea Lange expression on his face that we saw back in 1991, when his Pittsburgh Pirates team, caught up in a seven-game National League Championship Series with the Braves, scored no runs at all in their last eighteen innings of the year.

Swept by the Yankees in the scary-short Divisionals, the Twins scored early in every game but suffered many hard knocks, sometimes of their own making. In the second game, they were jolted by a tying, two-run A-Rod shot in the bottom of the ninth and a walkoff by Mark Teixeira in the eleventh. Out in Minneapolis, bases-empty seventh-inning dingers by A-Rod and Jorge Posada took away a one-run lead and then reversed it, silencing the hankie-wavers in the space of five pitches. Almost more shocking, come to think of it, was a play, back in the second game, when a Twins base runner, Carlos Gomez, overran second and was tagged out in a flash by Derek Jeter, ending the inning before a laggard teammate up ahead could deliver a sure Twins run to the plate.

The Yanks made it through each level this year without putting themselves into the rigors of a seventh game, but it was never an easy progression. Nothing much about the Championship Series with the Los Angeles Angels feels like fun in retrospect, even from this distance. Mostly, it was terrifying. I remember calling home once in mid-game from the Yankee Stadium press box, and hearing "I can't stand any more of this!" when my wife picked up the phone. Did anyone actually enjoy Game 5, out there in Anaheim, when the home-team Angels went ahead by four runs in the first inning, watched that lead disintegrate in a six-run Yankee seventh, and came back with a winning three of their own in the bottom half? Top and bottom, that inning required forty-four minutes, and it felt like a colonoscopy. And what possible pleasure could the Orange County citizenry have found in Game 2, the five-hour-and-ten-minute groaner, played here amid periods of icy rain, that left twenty-eight stranded base runners? This was the one that the Yankees tied in the bottom of the eleventh with A-Rod's solo home run—a stay-on instead of a walkoff—and the Angels lost in the thirteenth, when their second baseman, Maicer Izturis, pointlessly threw the ball away. Bring on the World Series, please, or maybe a tax audit.

Cliff Lee, the Phillies' fabulous lefty, faced off against C. C. Sabathia, the Yanks' ditto ditto, in Game 1 of the Series, which was a party of sorts for the two. Lee, who came to Philadelphia from Cleveland in mid-July in a pennant-making trade, had gone 22–2 for the Indians last year, and was awarded the American League Cy Young Award, succeeding his Indians teammate Sabathia in that honor. Their reunion was enjoyably but not anxiously close for most of the evening. It wound up 6–1, Phillies—an outcome that was almost visible when Lee fanned Jeter and Teixeira in the first inning and the holiday crowd at the Stadium went all murmurous. Working with impatient speed, Lee gave up six scattered hits (the Yankee run was unearned), struck out ten, and stayed on for the full distance. You could see the Yankee hitters thinking him over as they walked away after another empty at-bat. He throws the complete repertory—fastball, curveball, change, cutter—with precision, no honing in; the Yanks' Nick Swisher called it "dotting." A narrow six-three, Lee isn't overpowering—his fastball showed a metronomic ninety-two miles an hour, up on the scoreboard, pitch after pitch—but even for rooters on the other side he revived and confirmed some ideal about what pitchers are meant to be and how tough the game can be on the guy up there hacking. He throws with an elegant flail, hiding the ball behind his hip or knee and producing it from behind his left shoulder, already in full delivery. His finish brings his left leg up astern like a semaphore, while his arm swings back across his waist. This columnar closing posture—he's not twisted off to one side, like other pitchers, but driving forward, with the back leg still aloft, as his eyes follow the pitch—is classic and reminded me strongly of some fabled pitcher from my boyhood. He looked a little dusty and work-worn out there, which may have contributed to this impression. I thought about Dizzy Dean or Lon (the Arkansas Hummingbird) Warneke, but they were righties. Then I remembered Hal Newhouser, the Tigers' lefty ace in the nineteen-forties,

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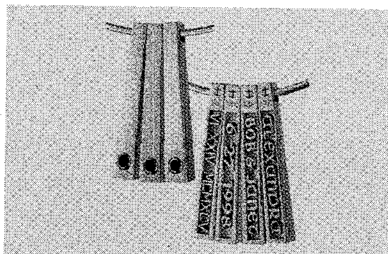

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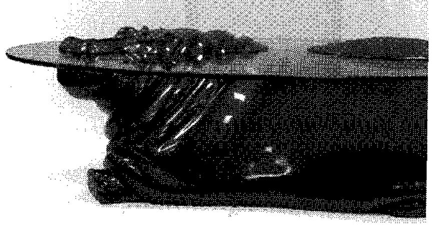

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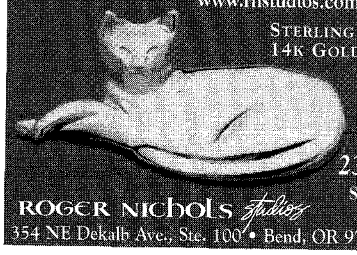

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who ate up batters much in the way that Lee does. Later, I put my question in a phone call to Seymour Siwoff, the dean of the Elias Sports Bureau. "Hmm," he said when I mentioned the flying back leg, "let me think about this for a minute." There was a pause, and then he said, "Why do I think it was somebody on the Tigers?"

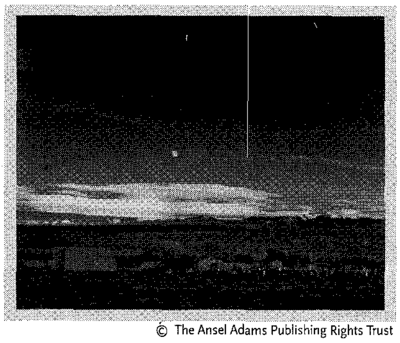
This was the game in which Chase Utley, the classy Philadelphia second baseman, hit a pair of home runs against Sabathia—the only round-trippers he'd given up to a left-handed batter at Yankee Stadium all year. Sometimes I think that baseball is being stripped bare by computerization—that the instantly ensuing first-ever-infield-fly-rule-out-in-a-tenth-inning-in-April figure will suck away the last mysteries of the game—but the announcement we got this time brought a soft "Wow!" in my sector of the press box: prior to Utley, the last left-handed batter to hit two home runs in a World Series game against a left-handed pitcher was Babe Ruth, in 1928. Utley, who has slicked-back, Jake Gittes hair, possesses a quick bat and a very short home-run stroke; he looks like a man in an A.T.M. reaching for his cash.

Cliff Lee comes from Arkansas, as does his pal A. J. Burnett, the Yankee Game 2 starter, who pitched almost better than Cliffy (as he calls him) but with less pleasure for the fans, since he works with agonizing deliberation. There was no excuse for dallying: he was throwing first-pitch strikes to everyone in sight, alternating his inside four-seam fastball, which drops straight down for a right-handed hitter, with an opposite-side inside two-seamer that looks like a ball to a left-handed batter until it changes its mind and sidles back over the plate. Ryan Howard, the eminent Philadelphia left-side slugger, fanned three times against Burnett, and then again in the ninth, against Mariano Rivera.

Burnett, a Tom Joad with beads, has that Ozarky look, too, but the Bronx fans on this night were giving more attention to his opposite, Pedro Martinez, their ancient Red Sox bugbear. In decline after four injury-marred seasons with the Mets, Pedro (he's thirty-eight) was picked up by the Phillies in July and, rehabilitated, ran up a nice little 5–1 record, plus another good start in the N.L.C.S. Strangely, given his eighteen years in the majors, this was just his second World Series game. Pedro was tough and entertaining out there—same wide-eyed stare, same fluttery fastballs plus jewelry adjustments—and picked up four strikeouts in the early going. The fans were patient, almost generous about it; they knew what they wanted and got it when Teixeira, leading off the fourth, took him deep into the Yankee bullpen, tying the game at 1–1. "Who's your Daddy? Who's your Daddy? Hoo hoo—who's your Daddy?" they chanted deeply, loving the old slur, rolling it out again and again—payback, of course, for that October fracas at Fenway Park, when Pedro half-defensively jostled the bald old Yankees coach Don Zimmer to the turf. The incident—this is like explaining Scripture—dates to 2003, and the taunting to a regular-season tilt the following year, when Pedro, beaten by the Yanks, turned gracious in the post-game: "I tip my hat and call the Yankees my daddy."

The Yankees took this one, 3–1—the winning run was another Daddy-knock, by Hideki Matsui in the sixth—tying things up, but extreme concision is going to be required now to get us through the rush of urgent innings, screeching turnabouts, and splendid contributing performances that went into this Yankee autumn. We could use most of the space just talking about Derek Jeter, who was being snarkily dismissed in the blogs in the spring but batted .334, with two hundred and twelve hits this time around—his seventh trip into that élite hitters' parlor. Nice, but how about his .344 in the post, or that .407 in the World Series? Just when you think you appreciate Derek enough, you don't. Of all the games I missed this year, the one I'll mourn was a soggy loss to the Orioles on September 11th, up at the Stadium, when Jeter's first hit of the night, a single, scooting up the right side, put him past Lou Gehrig with two thousand seven hundred and twenty-two lifetime hits: the most in Yankee history. His excited teammates, gang-hugging him over at first, skipped the pie this time.

Too bad, but I'm not going to get around to C. C. Sabathia's sunny looks and pavilion-sized pants and weird, white-toed spikes, or ask batters how they feel about his fastball-cutter-changeup assortment that arrives (he's six-seven and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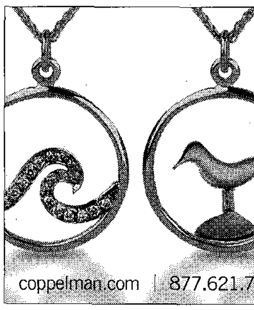
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two hundred and ninety pounds) like a loaded tea tray coming down an airshaft. Some other day will also be the proper time for me to deliver a critique of the $1.5-billion new Stadium, which I'm beginning to enjoy, despite an aversion to its clear message that dining, rather than baseball, should be the main event for fans. I enjoy the wild, Ginza-esque light shows—the "lightage," I mean—but I'd trade them for the steeply vertical stands of the vacant, now shrouded original and the walls of noise they produced on big nights.

The attractive and talented Phillies resisted strongly even while losing the first two games in their home Citizens Bank Park, sustaining the feeling among fans everywhere that this old-franchise Series, unlike the short, one-sided finales we'd seen in the past five years, was about the big boys again. I admired the restraint of the home-town fans when, in Game 3, the umps consulted a replay camera (a first ever) before deciding that an A-Rod double to right had actually nicked off a TV camera on the lip of the grandstand, making it a two-run homer instead. They knew that pitching, not luck, was going to settle things here—and perhaps, deep down, that their pitching wouldn't be enough.

Even with his club trailing, Phillies manager Charlie Manuel never once considered bringing Cliff Lee back on a shortened three days' rest, which changed the matchups, permitting the Yanks (and Sabathia) to grab Game 4 and the Phils (and Lee) No. 5. Neither game was exactly austere, with the teams putting up seventeen hits in the Yanks' 7–4 win, and nineteen the next day, with an 8–6 result for the locals. Utley stroked another homer in the first of these and two more the next night, tying Reggie Jackson's record of five in a six-game series. There was passing speculation that Utley would supplant Jackson in legend were he to waft another, but it died of unlikelihood. Reggie, discussing all this with the *News* columnist Mike Lupica back at the Stadium before the last game, simply murmured, "Come *on*." He pointed to the adjacent center-field stands, with their line of standup drinkers above Monument Park in the new configuration, and said, "My fifth is in the fucking bar."

WOOD

The last thing I ever wanted was to
write again about grief did you think I
would your grief this time not mine oh good

grief enough is enough in my life that is
enough was enough I had all those
grievances all those griefs all engraved

into the wood of my soul but would you
believe it the wood healed I grew up and
grew out and would you believe it I found

your old woody heart sprouting I thought
good new growth good new luxuriant green
leaves leaves on their woody stalks and I said

I'll stake my life on this old stick I'll stick
and we talked into the morning and night
and laughed green leaves and sometimes a flower

oh bower of good new love I would have it
I would bow to the new and the green
and wouldn't you know it you were a stick

yes I know a good stick so often and then
a stick in my ribs in my heart your old
dark wood your old dark gnarled stalk

sprouting havoc and now I have grief again
and now I've stood for what I never should
green leaves of morning dark leaves of night

—*Sarah Arvio*

I disagreed (in my heart, not in person) with Yankee manager Joe Girardi when he persisted with his announced three-man rotation, particularly after he attained a two-game advantage, but he has won this argument and all others with his club's shining new Championship. To me, his prime achievement in this triumphant year was conservation. By not loading up his relievers and resting some of his regulars a day or two at a time, he finished the endless summer with a roster that felt broad as well as deep. Old-pro batters who were struggling in the early postseason games (Matsui, Johnny Damon) came on like gangbusters at the end, as they do in dreams, while the robotically locked-in A-Rod (.455 and .429 in the first two rounds) sagged to a more human .250, but did not sulk or glaze over when he made an out. Reserved and cautious by nature, Girardi worked hard to become a less rigid manager in this, his second year as skipper, although he still blinks his eyes strangely after answering each question in the interview room: *Click!* Next channel. He and the rest of the team got examples in optimism all year long from the faux-hawked and exuberant Nick Swisher, who was one of the kid Yankees rocking to the strains of Metallica and Jay-Z in the clubhouse now, and became A. J. Burnett's sidekick in the walkoff cream-pie smushings. Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?

While the roses are going around, we should revisit those free-agent signings of C. C. Sabathia, Mark Teixeira, and

A. J. Burnett last winter, whose combined contracts cost the Yankees an extra $423.5 million, and accounted for $52 million out of the team's salary total of $201 million for 2009. (The next nearest is the Mets' $135 million, and the farthest the Marlins' $36 million.) Cries of unfairness and fresh tropes about the unlevel playing field, so ferocious in March, seemed fainter at the end this time, because each of those multimillionaires so clearly delivered at his job, and because the Yankees won. They will never be populist heroes, but this time it was O.K. to like them. General Manager Brian Cashman, so often second-guessed by the Tampa front office and badgered at his work by the overbearing but now ancient and ailing George Steinbrenner, was the Michelangelo of this club, and should feel carefree in office now, or certainly until the first three-game losing streak, come April.

November baseball is weighted with its imminent ending. Each at-bat can turn out to be the one we carry with us into the winter. In Game 4, it turned out to be Johnny Damon's ups against Brad Lidge, in the top of the ninth, with the score tied at 4–4, after Pedro Feliz's home run against Joba Chamberlain in the bottom of the eighth. As we know, the Yankees won this game with three runs in that same ninth, to go ahead 3–1 in the Series, but we need to stop for a minute to understand how close the teams still were up to that moment, and conceivably on the brink of an entirely different outcome. If Lidge could hold the Yankees off—and why wouldn't he, after brushing aside Matsui (a pinch-hitter this time) and striking out Jeter?—the Series would be even again, with the edge perhaps now going to the defending World Champions. Even though he was their long-term closer, this was his first appearance in this Series. He'd had an odd and difficult season, nothing like his dominant outings in the World Series last year, but there was every expectation that he'd keep the Yankees in check until his guys could win. The ensuing nine-pitch at-bat by Damon changed it all, and became the hinge of this World Series; when it was over, the Phillies were in fatal difficulties. This was a high-intensity guessing game between Damon and Lidge, in which Damon, at one-and-two and with two more interspersed balls, fouled off three more pitches, some easily, some with a late flick, then launched a sharp single to left center. The switch-hitter Teixeira, batting left here, took Lidge's first pitch for a ball as Damon took off for second. He beat the throw to the third baseman, Feliz, who was pulled over a bit toward first by the peg, and when Johnny spotted him a couple of feet away he bolted for third, all on his own. With Feliz in close pursuit, the pair looked like kids running down an alley.

The Phillies, you realized at last, had gone into their defensive shift against Teixeira, with all the infielders except third baseman Feliz loaded up between first and second, and Feliz, now not far from second, acting as shortstop. There was nothing new about this, of course, but when it comes along guys on the field need to remember to have someone ready to hustle over to cover third the moment there's a base runner aboard. You often see a pitcher or even the catcher suddenly noticing, oops, and making a scamper for that corner while there's still time. But the Phillies forgot, and now the Yankees had the go-ahead run ninety feet away. The Fox team of Joe Buck and Tim McCarver here claimed that this situation deprived Lidge of his killer slider, which dives downward as it approaches the plate: fearing that it might be in the dirt now and skip by his catcher, Carlos Ruiz, he'd have to rely only on his fastball. Lidge later denied this (Ruiz is a solid defensive catcher) and said that more sliders would have been forthcoming. Far from at ease, in any case, he hit Teixeira, two pitches along, and now had to face Rodriguez, who took a fastball for strike one, then lashed the ball into left field for a double and the tiebreaking run. (This, in case you've been waiting, was that big blow for A-Rod, what he called the hit of his career.) Moments later, Posada nailed a single to left center, bringing home Teixeira and A-Rod, to ice the game and put the Yankees ahead in the Series. Rivera, who'd warmed up in a hurry, set down the home side on eight pitches.

Damon, who turned thirty-six later that week, was in his fifteenth year in

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the majors, and his four-year contract with the Yankees (they're his fourth team) ran out when the Series ended. There are several reasons, then, to think about him once again and to savor the Lidge at-bat. Damon plants his left foot in the box when he first steps in and swings his right foot away so that he's facing the pitcher almost directly, with the bat in his right hand also pointing off to right. He's surveying, you think. Only at the last second does he step back and square up. He has a brisk swing, which can look anxiously defensive, but when he makes contact, as he'd done here, still on the full count, his decisive stroke opens him up again as the ball takes flight and starts him swiftly up the line.

Damon, whose father was a sergeant, grew up as an Army brat; his mother is Thai. He has dark, alert eyes and high cheekbones, and, with his short-style pants and ready ways, he will always look younger than his age. Who can forget Damon as an integral part of the 2003 "Cowboy Up" Red Sox champions, and the Red Sox Nation fans that summer turning up in T-shirts that read "What Would Johnny Damon Do?" I recall him even before that, when he was an eager, terrifically fast kid outfielder with the Kansas City Royals (he led the league in stolen bases in 2000), and then again at spring training in Arizona a few years later (he'd moved along to the Oakland A's), when his pretty and relaxed young wife sat a row or two behind us one afternoon, low in the first-base-side stands, minding their twin babies, Madeline and Jackson, and he kept coming by to smile at them. Now he has two more daughters and another wife, and he's an icon. I think we've seen the last of him with the Yanks.

Lee's win in Game 5 almost felt like a high-risk gift to Yankee fans—I heard this again and again—since it brought the teams back to the Stadium for at least one more festival. Most of the pregame excitement that evening centered on the old-guard Yankees—Jeter, Posada, Andy Pettitte, and Rivera—who'd played together in the post-season ever since 1995. "We've been together seventeen or eighteen years—that's half a lifetime," Jeter said later. "We're like brothers." All the brothers played, and Pettitte, who picked up his second win in the Series with his utterly convincing 7–3 clincher, looked happier at the end than any of them could remember. Mo Rivera, after working in this, his eighty-eighth post-season game, again starting in 1995, with an earned-run average over that stretch of 0.74, allowed that he was probably ready for five more years of this.

But no one in the Bronx or in the world expected or could have anticipated what another old Yankee, Hideki Matsui, did now, which was to hit a two-run homer inside the right-field foul pole (against Pedro Martinez again) in the second inning; hit a two-run single in the third; and (with another run already in) stroke a two-run double to right center in the fifth. All were decisive shots, and they nailed the season shut. Matsui batted .615 for the Series, with three home runs, and won the Series M.V.P. by about ten furlongs. I can't remember a closing performance anything like this, or the feeling, while it was happening, that I quickly needed to thank Hideki Matsui—with a bow or something—not just for tonight but for every game of his seven years of super-pro service with the Yankees. His straight-back, left-handed stance, with that almond-colored bat held still; his broad-shouldered, slashing cuts at anything up in the zone; his slightly tilted vertical style of running; the trim black hair just touching his uniform at the nape; the cracked smile—we knew all this, certainly, but in some oddly formal and removed fashion, because he was Japanese and because he didn't speak English easily. His silence kept him old-fashioned: a ballplayer from the black-and-white newspaper-photograph days, before our heroes talked. Many of us at the Stadium shared these thoughts, I'm sure, and wished we'd taken a better grip on such complicated feelings before this last game of the year, because he, too, had just become a free agent. He's thirty-five, and his knees are shot, and the Yankees want, or should want, to be younger. He would very much like to sign on again, it's said, but I'm pretty sure that that won't happen, either. Come back, Hideki. Come back, Johnny. Shane, come back. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

MY PARENTS, ENID AND SAL, USED TO BE PORN STARS

BY MIKE SACKS

ENID: Yes? May I help you? Why are you knocking on my front door?

CHUCK: Ma'am, I work as a roof repairman. I just turned nineteen and I'm in terrific shape. It's really hot out here and I am very thirsty. I'm also quite hungry. My appetites are insatiable.

ENID: A roof repairman, huh? Do you have any references?

CHUCK: No, but I am very lonely.

ENID: No references!

CHUCK: No, Ma'am.

ENID: Can you fix gutters?

CHUCK: I can fix *anything*.

ENID: Hmm, that's a good skill. What are your rates?

CHUCK: Ma'am, if you'd just let me into the house, I think you'd be *plenty* pleased. . . .

ENID: I wouldn't be so sure of that. I've had bad experiences with handymen in the past. Sloppy work.

CHUCK: Nothing sloppy about me. Here, let me take off my shirt. And my pants.

ENID: You're just wasting my time. Send me an estimate and I'll think about it. Maybe in the fall.

CHUCK: But . . .

SAL (*from the family room*): Close the goddam door already! The blasted air-conditioning!

—*From "Let's Face It, the Roof Didn't Need Fixing Anyway," 1999.*

NURSE CHERRY: So what seems to be the problem today?

SAL: Just an annual checkup.

NURSE CHERRY: The doctor will be here any minute. In the meantime, is there anything that I can help you with? I'm a very talented nurse.

SAL: I'd rather wait for the doctor.

NURSE CHERRY: Are you sure?

SAL: Yes.

NURSE CHERRY (*seductively*): Are you *positive*?

SAL: Yes. But let me tell you what I *do* want.

NURSE CHERRY (*less seductively*): O.K.

SAL: I'd like for you to put on some socks. Your feet are filthy. Do you usually walk around barefoot? And then I'd like for you to check the supply closet for any extra samples of Advil. I always like to carry a few with me. Just a handful. No rush, honey, take your time.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

—*From "Office Like a Damn Freezer!," 2000.*

SAL: Let me just put on my glasses. . . . Can't quite figure out how this works. . . . Where's the "On" button? . . . If my son were here, he'd know. . . . Electronics aren't really my specialty. . . . Instructions would really help. . . . Still can't find the "On" button. . . .

—*From "At the Orgy," 2003.*

ENID: Now, let's see . . . what do I need here. . . .

BO: Hello there!

ENID: Hello.

BO: I see you're shopping for nuts.

ENID: So?

BO: Do you like nuts?

ENID: Yes.

BO: How about buns?

ENID: Sure, nuts and buns.

BO: Would you like to see my nuts and buns?

ENID: No, thank you, I have my own nuts and buns.

BO: I think you'll like mine a *whole* lot better.

ENID: Do you work here in the grocery?

BO: Yes, my name is Bo. And I am in charge of the nuts and buns.

ENID: Like I said, Bo, I have my own nuts and buns. But I *am* curious about something: I noticed that the whole-grain hamburger rolls were listed as on sale in the newspaper, but they're still regular price on the shelves. Here, allow me to show you.

BO: You don't want to see my nuts?

ENID: No, thank you. But I simply love your cutoff shorts. Adorable! Did you fashion them yourself, Bo?

—*From "Double Coupon Day," 2004.*

SAL: Blasted map!

ENID: Pull over and ask that hitchhiker for directions.

SAL: Where?

ENID: Over there. See her? The young woman in the bikini? She's holding a cardboard sign that reads, "Looking for a 3-Way!"

SAL: What the hell does that mean?

ENID: It's probably the slang.

SAL: Whatever it means, she probably has no idea where Route 116 is. Forget it. Why ask for trouble?

—*From "I Mean, Really, Why Ask for Trouble?," 2009.* ♦

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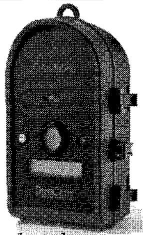

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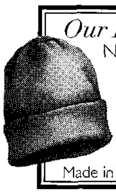

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LETTER FROM HONDURAS

AN OLD-FASHIONED COUP

As elections loom, can a deposed leader return?

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

We met on a sort of traffic island with tables. Jhonny Lagos, who is the editor-in-chief of *El Libertador,* a newspaper in Honduras, said meeting indoors was too dangerous. "We're scattered around the city now. Our office isn't safe. So we're working on laptops, in cafés, from home. We've had death threats."

Lagos was sweating in the morning sun. He was a burly man, forty-four, hyperactive, unshaven. It was two days before Halloween. The month before, two men in ski masks had snatched his graphics editor, Delmer Membreño, off the street, he said. "They hooded him, drove him out of the city, put him on his knees, beat him, kicked him, burned him with cigarettes, put a 9-mm. pistol to his head. He thought he was going to die. They took his shoes and cameras and told him they were going to do worse to me—they called me Jhonnycito. They said they would kill my children. Then they left him there. He went to Chile last week. He's in bad shape, psychologically."

Lagos handed me a copy of *El Libertador* which included a story about Membreño's abduction. There were photographs of the burns on his face and arms. "I'm not leaving," Lagos said. "*They* should leave. I've committed no crime. They've committed many crimes." He meant the de facto regime that has ruled Honduras since a military coup on June 28th. "It's a combination military coup, business coup, religious coup," he said. "It all pertains to the oligarchy that controls this country."

I noticed that he was carrying a fat paperback of Plutarch's "Lives." Lagos grinned. "I heard that Benjamin Franklin read this book and was influenced by it. Do you know if Benjamin Franklin read Plutarch?"

The coup went down in classic fashion. Two hundred soldiers stormed the Presidential palace just before dawn. They overpowered bodyguards, shot out the locks, and pulled the President, José Manuel Zelaya Rosales, from his bed. They handcuffed him, threw him on the floor, and cursed at him and beat him. Then they bundled Zelaya, still in his pajamas, into an armored car, took him to a military airfield, and put him on a plane to Costa Rica.

The problem was that military coups are passé in Latin America. Honduras had enjoyed regular democratic transitions of power since 1982, when a military government was replaced by an elected one. The afternoon of the coup, the plotters sought to legitimatize their actions at a special congressional session, producing a resignation letter from Zelaya. The letter was a forgery—it even had the wrong date, a remnant from a plan to carry out the plot a few days earlier. They also claimed to have had a secret arrest warrant, but there are suspicions that it was produced after the fact. Zelaya was certainly deported on no legal basis. Still, the legislature quickly named the coup's leader, Roberto Micheletti Bain, the new President. It was a "*golpe profiláctico,*" its supporters said—a coup meant to prevent whatever was coming next.

The *golpistas* had some support. President Zelaya had managed to alienate the legislature, including much of his own party (he and Micheletti were both in the Liberal Party); the country's businessmen; the Catholic Church hierarchy; and the Army and the police. Honduras is often said to be controlled by ten families. To the extent that that is true, almost all ten had come to loathe Zelaya, and the many newspapers and radio and TV stations they own were, naturally, comfortable with the coup. Also supportive were those Hondurans, not all of them wealthy rightists, who had been alarmed by Zelaya's increasingly close relationship with Venezuela's populist leader, Hugo Chávez.

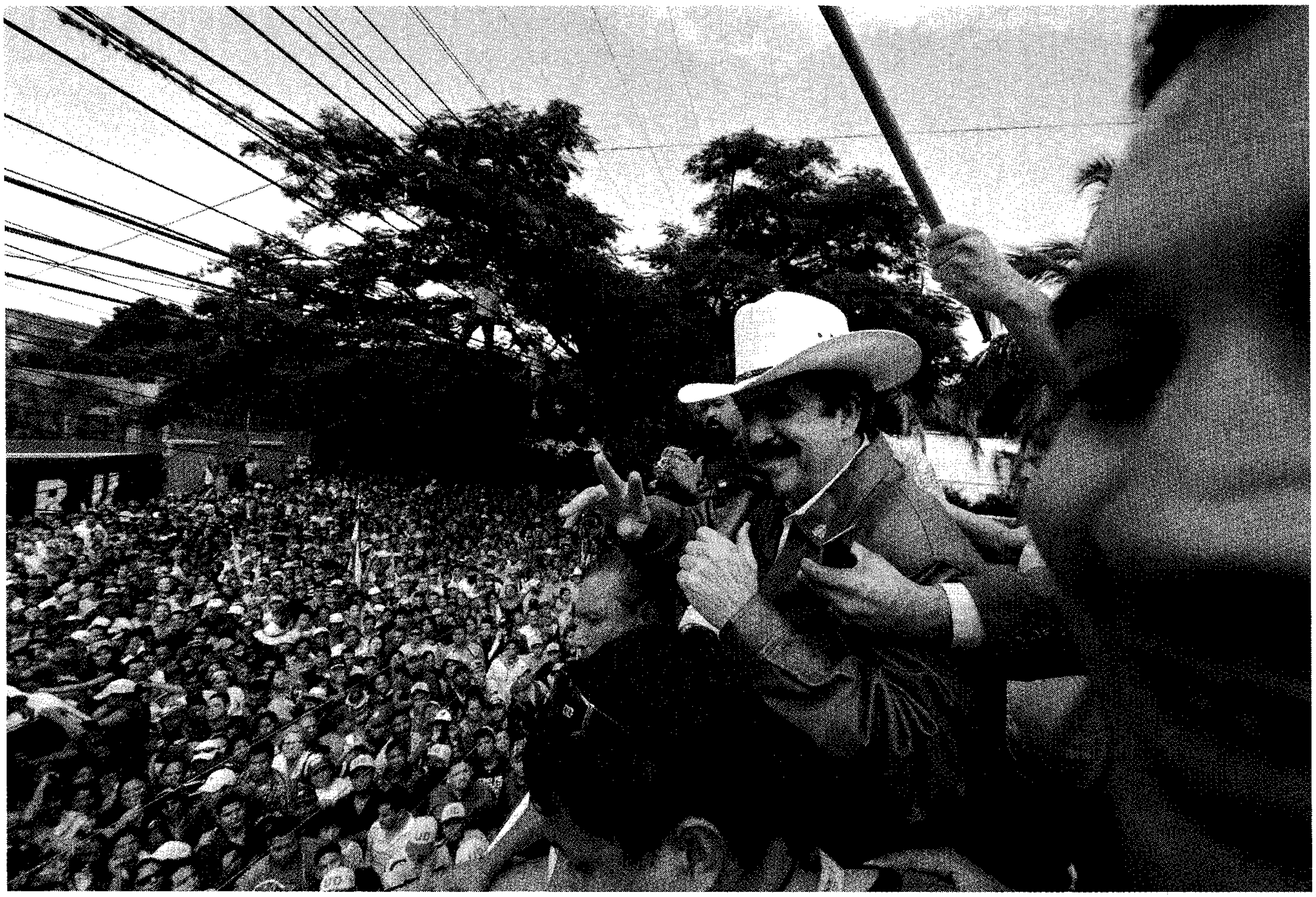
That left a lot of Hondurans, though, who were appalled by the coup, and the streets and highways soon filled with them. The Army and the police met them with tanks and tear gas, clubs and rubber bullets, and, in some cases, live ammunition. A curfew was imposed, and various civil liberties were suspended. There were deaths, disappearances, and mass detentions. Still, the protests went on. Zelaya may have lost the support of the country's traditional institutions, but he had gained a large following among teachers, labor unions, and peasant organizations. Even people who had not particularly liked him came out to protest. His policies were not the issue; democracy was.

The international response was hostile as well. Honduras was suspended from the Organization of American States, and the coup was condemned by the United Nations. No country recognized Micheletti's de facto government. The United States, although no friend of Chávez and wary of Zelaya, suspended all non-humanitarian aid. The U.S. visas of Micheletti and other coup leaders were revoked. The *golpistas* were privately stunned, I was told, by the firmness of the U.S. reaction—this would never have happened if the Republicans had still been in power. Even their promise to hold Presidential elections on schedule, in late November, left the Obama Administration unmoved. The results of those elections would not be legitimate unless the coup was reversed and Zelaya restored to office, the Administration said.

But the signals from Washington were mixed. Congressional conservatives rallied around the coup leaders, who, along with allies like the Latin American Business Council, have reportedly spent at least six hundred thousand dollars on Washington lobbyists and lawyers. (Lanny Davis, the former Clinton White House special counsel, and his firm pocketed much of that.) By early October, nine congressional Republicans had visited Honduras, vocally supporting Micheletti's regime. One delegation was led by Senator Jim DeMint, of South Carolina, known for his vow to "break" President Obama over health-care reform. DeMint had been blocking confirmation of two key Obama diplomatic appointments in Latin America.

Zelaya did not go quietly into exile. A week after his overthrow, he tried to fly back to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Tens of thousands of people came to the airport, but the Army blocked the runway with trucks and troops. At least two demonstrators were killed, and Zelaya's plane could not land. He next tried to enter on foot, through a Nicaraguan border post, but was foiled again, and another young supporter was killed. Finally, on September 21st, Zelaya sneaked back into Honduras, concealed in a vehicle, and turned up, with his wife, at the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa. Roberto Micheletti assured Hondurans that Zelaya was not in the country, that he was, in fact, in a hotel suite in Nicaragua. Then Zelaya appeared on national television. Thousands flocked to the Brazilian Embassy, which is on a small street in a hillside residential neighborhood. They were beaten and dispersed by soldiers and riot police.

A standoff ensued. The regime issued threats and ultimatums: Zelaya would be arrested if he stepped outside the Embassy. Zelaya was defiant. The Brazil-



Manuel Zelaya, the ousted President, greets supporters in September, after reëntering Honduras in defiance of the new regime.

ORLANDO SIERRA/AFP/GETTY

ians were discomfited but steadfast. The United States was officially aghast. The U.S. representative to the O.A.S. called Zelaya's return "irresponsible and foolish." The troops surrounding the Embassy made life miserable for those inside—limiting deliveries of food and medicine, blasting music, and shining powerful arc lights. The hundreds of Zelaya supporters who had crammed into the compound dwindled to a couple of dozen. Among them were several journalists, who managed to send out unnerving reports of food-borne illnesses and suspected chemical attacks.

I managed to reach Zelaya by phone, and asked him what would happen if he was not restored to the Presidency. "The country will continue to be isolated, the crisis will deepen," he said. His voice sounded almost serene. He called the *golpistas* "dictators." Negotiators were meeting daily at a Tegucigalpa hotel, under the auspices of the Americans and the O.A.S., trying to end *la crisis*, but Zelaya wasn't sure that his team was talking to the right people. "When you have a military regime, I imagine the military makes the decisions," he said.

The main sticking point was Zelaya's restoration. The coup leaders said they would never allow it. His dismissal, they argued, had been legal, and he was now charged with treason, among other things. Vilma Morales, the Micheletti team's spokesperson, and a former head of the supreme court, told me that Zelaya could "face criminal trials. There is movement on some of the charges already."

Zelaya had told me, "I am not someone who remains quiet in the face of insults. I don't bow my head or bend my knee before those who want to enslave me and take my freedom. But I resist peacefully, and that's what I have asked the people of Honduras to do. Our demonstrations are peaceful, because we don't want to answer with violence those who attack us with violence."

That was true, but when I arrived in Tegucigalpa, in late October, I found a widespread belief that a word from Zelaya could spark an insurrection. His supporters had formed a broad alliance known as the National Resistance Front, which has its base among workers, students, and campesinos, and in the many dirt-poor *barrios marginales* that surround Tegucigalpa. Zelaya's daughter Xiomara Hortensia, who is known as La Pichu, cuts a distinctive figure at resistance rallies. She is twenty-four, slim and glamorous. She is known for singing boleros, accompanied by her father on the guitar. The resistance provides her with bodyguards. La Pichu and her sister cook their father's meals, which are carried into the Brazilian Embassy by a U.N. team, in order to reduce the risk of poisoning. She told me that her father wasn't guilty of treason or corruption or anything else: "My dad came back here because he's clean."

But the resistance wants more than Zelaya's restoration. Its members want to change Honduran politics and society, to rewrite the country's constitution, replacing a system that has failed to deliver prosperity or social justice—according to the World Bank, more than forty per cent of Hondurans live in extreme poverty—with a more direct, "participatory" form of democracy. The President seems almost incidental to their aspirations. In fact, as a redeemer figure, Manuel Zelaya is a distinctly odd choice.

Everybody calls him Mel. His family was part of the old rural aristocracy, and he grew up on a ranch in Olancho, which is the Texas of Honduras, famed for its tough, proud ways. Zelaya, who is fifty-seven, wears a big white Stetson and has a big black mustache. In a campaign video called "Viene Mel" ("Here Comes Mel") he gallops through a meadow on horseback, brandishing the red-and-white flag of the Liberal Party.

In 1975, when Zelaya was twenty-two, fourteen activists, including two priests, were massacred on his family's hacienda. It was an era in which death squads killed campesinos suspected of supporting agrarian reform. Zelaya's father was said to have participated in the killings and, along with a local military commander, went to prison for the murders. (He was granted amnesty in 1980.) I heard several versions of this story, including one from a close associate of the victims, Rafael Alegría, a campesino from Olancho who is now a leader of the National Resistance Front. In every version, the young Zelaya visited his father in prison often, and never accepted that his father was guilty of anything beyond bad judgment.

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Zelaya is often described in foreign press reports as a "leftist logging magnate," which old friends find amusing. "Mel wasn't rich—his family's money was mostly gone—and he was certainly never a leftist," one told me. When Zelaya served in the national congress, he was mostly known as a bon vivant. The big money in Honduras, formerly in bananas, cattle, timber, and land, is now in banking, energy, telecommunications, mass media, and the outsourcing factories known as *maquilas*. The country's élite is so small, though, that basically everyone in it knows everyone else, and when Zelaya was elected President there was no reason to think that he would inconvenience his friends.

He surprised them. His cabinet included businessmen, but also determined reformers. "His rhetoric for the poor was beautiful," Carlos Hernández, an anti-poverty activist, said. "Here comes this man cutting the figure of a campesino, with the hat, travelling the country, sitting down with anyone, having coffee, rolling beans in a tortilla with his hand. Giving them a hundred dollars. They'd never seen a President like this before." Hernández himself was not impressed, but many poor people were.

Zelaya's populism was never humble, and always self-dramatizing. He did lower school fees and ram through an increase in the minimum wage—it remained less than two dollars an hour, and it didn't apply to foreign-owned *maquilas*, but it was enough to enrage many business owners. Zelaya made more enemies by opposing the privatization of telecommunications. He also made an oil deal with Venezuela. The terms for Honduras were excellent, but energy companies and big importers, who included some of the country's richest families, lost out. Hugo Chávez, moreover, seemed to be Zelaya's new best friend.

Unlike Chávez's other allies (in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and, of course, Cuba), Zelaya never turned against the United States. He did not target U.S. corporations, and he coöperated with American military drug-interdiction efforts. Still, in September, 2008, Otto Reich, a Cuban émigré and former Bush official, issued Zelaya a pointed warning in an interview with a Honduran newspaper: "If President Zelaya wants to be an ally of our enemies, let him think about what might be the consequences of his actions and words."

Reich also accused Zelaya of corruption. There is no question that corruption was a problem. When Zelaya took office, Honduras was, according to Transparency International, the most corrupt nation in Central America, and its dismal ranking persisted under Zelaya. The congress, the judiciary, the press—all were seen by Hondurans as basically for sale. Zelaya's relations with legislators deteriorated as the congress, at the behest of its traditional sponsors in the private sector, blocked his reform efforts and judicial appointments. Fatefully, Zelaya turned to the Army. In the nineteen-nineties, as the region's wars wound down, Honduras—which, though

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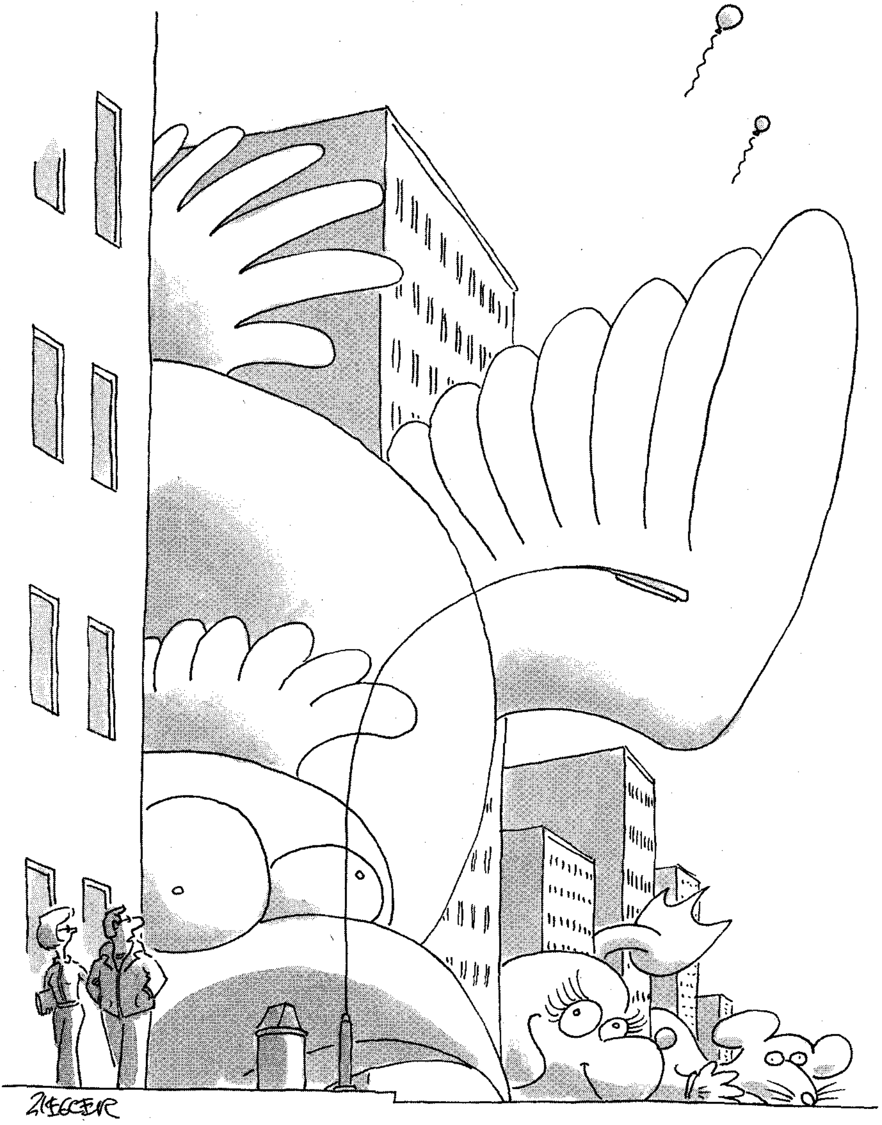


"Uh-oh. Not a good start to the holiday shopping season."

• •

not at war itself, had been the main staging ground for the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan Contras—did a better job of distancing the military from politics than did most of its neighbors. But Zelaya, seeking domestic allies, made the Army's wish list a priority. He revived, as people say, the *protagonismo* of the military.

The Honduran left—peasant organizations, unions—was slow to embrace Zelaya. Then, in 2008, Zelaya began to push the idea of a "Fourth Urn." In the elections scheduled for November 29, 2009, he proposed that, alongside the traditional ballot boxes for local, congressional, and Presidential candidates, there be one for a referendum on whether to hold a constituent assembly and rewrite the constitution. The Honduran constitution, which was produced under the last military government, is seen as a prime obstacle to political reform: the executive branch is weak; the Army has extraordinary responsibilities; faulty reasoning and contradictions abound. (Óscar Arias, the Costa Rican President and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, has described the Honduran constitution as "the worst in the world.") Now the left began to like Mel better, and the élites began to consider overthrowing him.

His opponents alleged that he was trying to remain in power—that the first thing he would change in the constitution was the clause restricting Presidents to a single four-year term. Zelaya claimed that that was absurd; he would be out of office long before the constituent assembly, if it was approved, convened. But he offered a compromise: a nonbinding national referendum in June, 2009, asking voters if they wanted a Fourth Urn in November.

The referendum became the showdown. The supreme court and the congress ruled that it would be illegal. Zelaya rejected the ruling, and asked the Army to distribute the ballots. The head of the armed forces, General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, refused. The Army was clearly switching sides. Zelaya fired Vásquez, who was promptly reinstated by the supreme court.

The coup came on the morning of the referendum. The leaders of the left believed that it was not Zelaya whom the *golpistas* feared but the popular movement. If so, the coup backfired. Popular resistance surged—it achieved *protagonismo*—and it was organized around the goal of reversing the coup.

American fast-food chains have enjoyed generous tax exemptions in Honduras, and they dominate shopping streets and malls, both commercially and visually, their bulbous plastic signs layered over the tropical sky: Burger King, Wendy's, Pizza Hut, Dunkin' Donuts. The main act of violence committed by the resistance to date seems to have been the torching of a Popeye's in Tegucigalpa. (Anti-coup activists told me that they thought the regime itself had burned the place down in order to discredit them.) Soldiers often massed suddenly in front of banks and hotels. These deployments can be unnerving—all the drawn machine guns. Driving back to my hotel one night, I ran into a military roadblock. Soldiers in camouflage gestured angrily with their rifles. I drove for miles through the deserted city to find another route.

One afternoon, I came upon a badly injured protester lying next to the driveway between a Chili's and a Popeye's. He was a light-skinned man in his fifties, and he had been clubbed so hard in the spine, apparently with one of the forked iron bars used by the security forces, that he could not move or speak. His friends were loading him into an ambulance, as a group of soldiers watched from a nearby McDonald's parking lot.

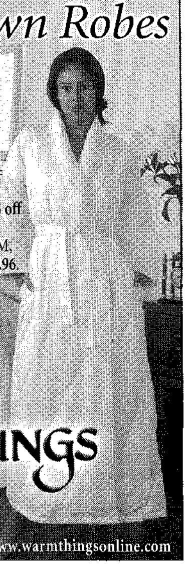
"We had a permit," a young woman told me. "But they attacked anyway." Her eyes were streaming—a tear-gas *bomba* had bounced near her. She said her name was Carla Rivera. She was an accountant with two children. Her T-shirt had a face stencilled on it—not of Zelaya but of Francisco Morazán, a nineteenth-century military leader who is the national hero. Rivera said, "They wear hoods, but we're not allowed to wear even bandannas"—she coughed and wiped her eyes—"against gas, against cameras."

"They take our pictures for their terrorist database," her husband, Francisco Castillo, a real-estate agent, said. He was tall and calm. He introduced me to an elderly woman standing nearby. "María Elena," he said. "She's a nun. She was kicked out of her order for being here." His wife was now doubled over: the tear gas was making her ill. "What can we do?" Castillo said. "Just let them have our country?"

Zelaya's term was supposed to run until January 27th, and the coup's opponents are planning to boycott the elections unless he is restored. The elections are still scheduled for November 29th. "We will work to delegitimatize these fraudulent elections," Alegría, the peasant leader, told me. "And after November 29th we will delegitimatize the leaders produced by the fraud."

It was hard to see how elections could be held freely and fairly in the atmosphere of state terror that gripped Honduras, but the Micheletti regime is determined. The two main candidates for the Presidency—Pepe Lobo, of the National Party, and Elvin Santos, of the Liberal Party—are out campaigning, their rallies surrounded by soldiers, and every day the pro-coup newspapers carry stories about the Army's heroic poll preparations. Those who would boycott the elections are called terrorists, anarchists; the leader of the national bar association thought that such people could perhaps be charged with sedition or terrorism.

Micheletti, in his television appearances, tends to glower, and speak from the side of his mouth, a bit like Dick Cheney, and often seems to be keeping his temper just barely under control—until he abruptly bellows, "Viva Honduras! Viva Honduras! Viva Honduras!" Micheletti was in his thirties when he finished high school, while living and working in New Orleans, where he ran a clothing store. According to an opinion poll in October, only twenty-eight per cent of Hondurans looked on him



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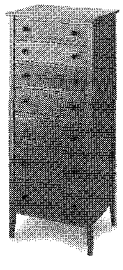

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favorably. He and the other coup leaders have lately tried to use soccer to improve their position. The national soccer team just qualified for the World Cup, for the first time since 1982, and the country is ecstatic about it. Soccer matches play continually on TV, interspersed with patriotic footage of the Honduran Army marching and performing maneuvers, all to the same cry: "Viva Honduras!"

One problem with all this is that the mother of the team's captain, Amado Guevara, is a passionate opponent of the coup. She presented La Pichu with a soccer shirt autographed by her son for Mel, the nation's prisoner-savior. This put young Guevara in an awkward position, since Micheletti had invited the team to the Presidential palace the day before. Guevara denied that he had been involved in sending the shirt. For that, his gallantry was widely questioned. Was he calling his own mother a liar? Was he insulting La Pichu?

Across from my hotel was a livid graffito: "Do something patriotic—kill an Arab." It referred to the large Middle Eastern community in Honduras, made up primarily of Palestinian Christians, who began arriving more than a century ago and have done exceptionally well in business. Indeed, a majority of the richest families in the country are of Palestinian origin; they are called *turcos*. The other extremely successful immigrant group, although smaller in number, is, in a nice twist, Jews. The two communities, by all accounts, get along quite well.

Yani Rosenthal is the scion of a leading business family. He was Zelaya's chief of staff for the first two years of his Presidency. We talked on a sunny balcony. I had heard people say that the oligarchy was panicking, sending its families to the States for safety. Rosenthal, a compact, natty man in his forties, didn't seem to be panicking. His family owns, among many other things, a newspaper and a TV station, which propelled him, willy-nilly, into coup politics. "We had a bomb thrown at the station after we let two of Mel's ministers speak from hiding," he said. "The government threatened to raid us, but I called this guy I know in *la resistencia* and he called a few thousand resistance members to defend our station and they were there in minutes and were successful. We got lucky. They're not usually so efficient." At the paper, he said, he tries to compel his editors, who are anti-coup, to provide balanced coverage: "For every three pro-Mel op-eds, I say they should run three anti. But Micheletti's still pissed at me."

Rosenthal laughed. Overbearing politicians came and went. He made it clear that the U.S. had not revoked *his* visa. Life went on. "Last week, we went to the cays to catch the red-snapper run," he said. "There are just a couple of weeks when they migrate through there. After the first cold fronts roll off North Carolina, you know, the fish head down to Venezuela, and we caught it perfectly. Two hundred fish in a day! Fantastic. My daughter usually goes with me on those trips, but she's in school in Boston. She's so jealous. 'Daddy, it's so cold here.'" He gave another laugh, showing small, fantastically white teeth.

The Honduran economy, already in recession, had now, with the coup, stalled completely, Rosenthal said. "Tourism stopped. Private investment stopped, both foreign and internal. Foreign aid—that was six per cent of the G.N.P. People here are keeping their money in cash. Not even in property." As a businessman, he understood the private sector's support for the coup. "But you have to wait," he said. "No matter how unpopular your President is. What were Bush's poll numbers in June, '08? The U.S. waited for Bush's term to end."

Manuel Acosta Bonilla, a former Honduran Ambassador to the United Nations, is a coup supporter. "The whole world's against us, and all we did was get rid of a bad President," he said. Acosta is an ample older man, with thick glasses and a gravelly voice. He thought Micheletti should simply leave Zelaya in the Brazilian Embassy. "Pull back the Army," he said. "He's going nowhere. He has no forces."

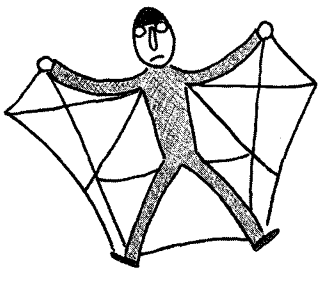
We were sitting in Acosta's study. I glanced at a framed photogravure portrait on the wall. "General Manuel Bonilla," Acosta said. "My great-grandfather. Twice President of Honduras." Acosta chuckled. He, like Zelaya, is from Olancho. "Melito, Melito," he said softly. "I knew his parents." He sighed, took a sip of coffee. "Mel is a phenomenon of a banana republic."

Acosta had been great friends, he said, with John Negroponte, the American spymaster-diplomat who reportedly oversaw the Contra operation in Honduras. He said that he wished Washington would send Negroponte down to straighten things out.

The presumed omnipotence of the United States was a theme I heard from all points on the Honduran political spectrum. Rafael Alegría, the resistance leader, told me, "Obama could tell the Pentagon to tell the Army to go back to the barracks and reverse the *golpe*. Definitely." A local journalist wasn't so sure about Obama. "He's hemmed in by other hard-right interests there," he said. "But the Pentagon? They could solve this in a second. The U.S. can do anything."

The United States did turn up the pressure on the regime in late October. Hillary Clinton called Micheletti and harangued him, reportedly, for half an hour. Afterward, he joked that she seemed to have a limited vocabulary: "All she kept saying was 'restitution, restitution, restitution'"—that is, Zelaya needed to be reinstated, period. Washington sent a high-level delegation to Tegucigalpa to try to end the stalemate. La Pichu told me by phone that she hoped that an agreement could be reached, but that "a lot depends on the final text."

On October 30th, an accord was finally signed—"a historic agreement," Hillary Clinton said. "I cannot think of another example of a country in Latin America that, having suffered a rupture of its democratic and constitutional order, overcame such a crisis through negotiation and dialogue." The Obama Administration had, it seemed, defended a critical principle of a new American diplomacy: coups would not stand. The headline on the Washington *Post's* editorial was "A WIN IN HONDURAS." On Reuters, it was "HONDURAS' ZELAYA SET TO RETURN TO POWER."



Zelaya declared himself satisfied. "We are optimistic that my restitution is imminent," he said. He was still stuck in the Brazilian Embassy, but Thomas Shannon, the Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, who led the American delegation, said that the U.S. was working on getting him out.

La Pichu was right, though. A lot depended on the final text of the agreement, which turned out to require a congressional vote on Zelaya's restoration. Optimists assumed that this would amount to a formality. They were mistaken. Days passed. The leader of the congress asked the supreme court for an opinion. A "verification commission" that included the U.S. Labor Secretary, Hilda Solis, met with all concerned. Then Solis, after a day in Honduras, returned home. Micheletti, who had assured the verification commission that he was ready to step down, began to vacillate. He went back to an earlier position: that Zelaya should also renounce the Presidency. (In the end, a symbolic gesture—ceding power to his own cabinet, for the week of the election only—was as far as Micheletti would go. Even then, if "peace is threatened," Micheletti said, he would take the reins again immediately.)

I was reminded of something Zelaya had told me before the agreement was signed. "It's up in the air, what the international community will do in the face of the insinuations of this totalitarian government," he said. "It's up in the air, its capability or its impotence. We will be able to evaluate it in the days ahead."

Four days after the accord was signed, Thomas Shannon jolted Honduras, and much of Latin America, by suggesting, on CNN en Español, that, even if Zelaya were not restored to the Presidency, the United States would recognize the results of the November elections. Two days later, Senator Jim DeMint lifted his hold on the confirmation of Shannon to become U.S. Ambassador to Brazil. Hillary Clinton, DeMint said, had assured him that the Administration would recognize the upcoming Honduran election results "regardless of whether former President Manuel Zelaya is returned to office."

The next day, November 6th, Zelaya pronounced the accord "dead." It looked as if an old-fashioned coup could still succeed in Latin America, after all. ◆

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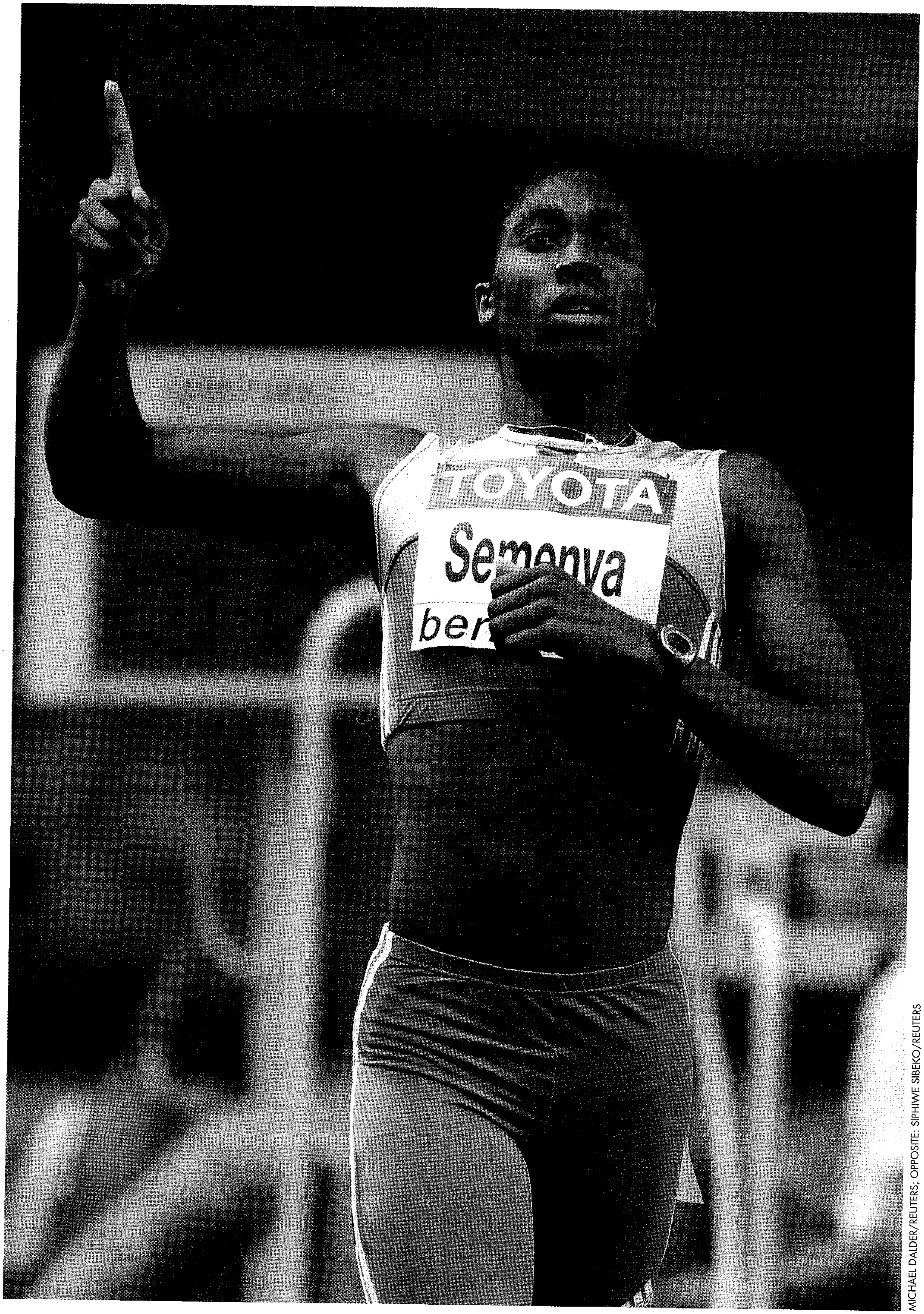
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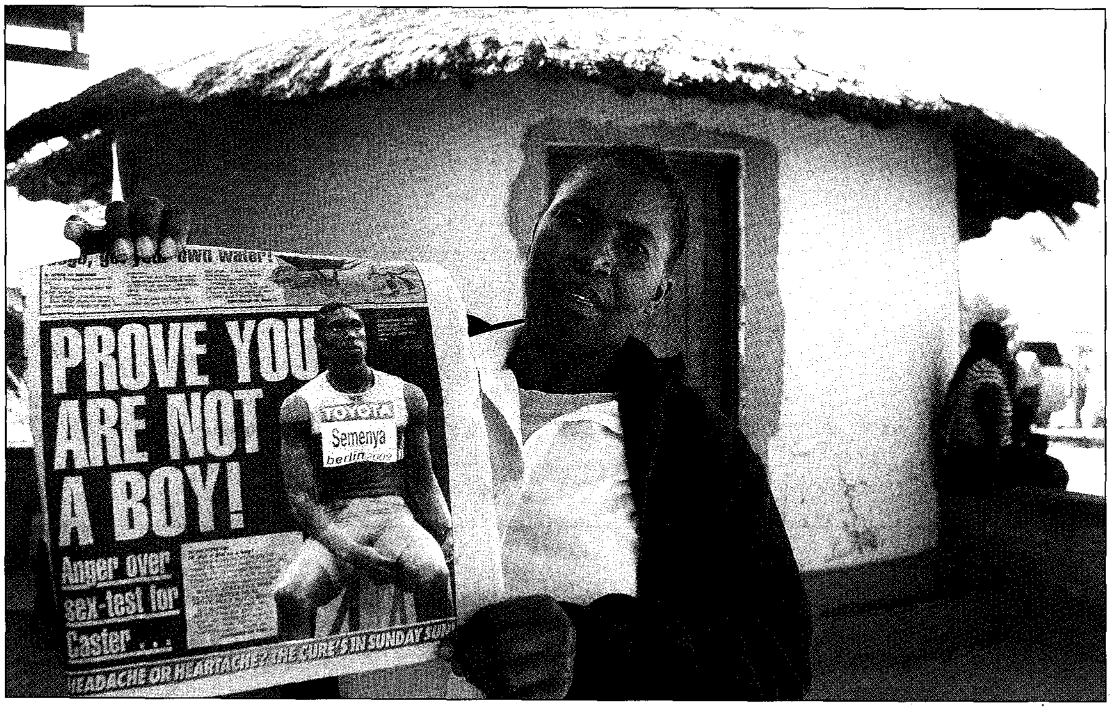
A REPORTER AT LARGE

EITHER/OR

Sports, sex, and the case of Caster Semenya.

BY ARIEL LEVY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HEADACHE OR HEARTACHE? THE CURE'S IN SUNDAY SUN

What is the ultimate difference between a man and a woman? Semenya's mother holds a picture of her daughter.

When people in South Africa say "Limpopo," they mean the middle of nowhere. They are referring to the northernmost province of the country, along the border with Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, where few people have cars or running water or opportunities for greatness. The members of the Moletjie Athletics Club, who live throughout the area in villages of small brick houses and mud-and-dung huts, have high hopes nonetheless.

One day in late September, twenty teen-age athletes gathered for practice on a dirt road in front of Rametlwana Lower Primary School, after walking half an hour through yellow cornfields from their homes, to meet their coach, Jeremiah Mokaba. The school's track is not graded, and donkeys and goats kept walking across it to graze on the new grass that was sprouting as the South African winter gave way to spring. "During the rainy season, we can't train," said Mokaba, a short man wearing a brown corduroy jacket with a golden Zion Christian Church pin on the lapel. "We have nowhere to go inside."

For cross-country, Mokaba and his co-coach, Phineas Sako, train their runners in the miles of bush that spread out behind the track, toward the mountains in the distance. The land is webbed with brambles, and the thorns are a serious problem for the athletes, who train barefoot. "They run on loose stones, scraping them, making a wound, making a scar," Sako, a tall, bald man with rheumy eyes and a big gap between his two front teeth, said. "We can't stop and say we don't have running shoes, because we don't have money. The parents don't have money. So what must we do? We just go on."

The athletes and their coaches apologized for not having a clubhouse in which to serve tea. They didn't like talking out in the wind and the dust. There was music playing down the road at a brick-front bar, and chickens squawking in people's front yards, where they are kept in enclosures made out of tree branches. "The most disadvantaged rural area," Sako said, laughing a little and stretching his arms out wide. "That is where you are."

The fastest runner in the club now is a seventeen-year-old named Andrew who recently became the district champion in the fifteen-hundred-metre event. The average monthly income for black Africans in Limpopo—more than ninety-seven per cent of the local population—is less than a thousand rand per month, roughly a hundred and thirty-five dollars. (For white residents, who make up two per cent of the population, it is more than four times that amount.) "I think I will go to the Olympics," Andrew said, with conviction.

Joyce, a tiny girl in a pink sweater who is eighteen but looked much younger, was similarly optimistic. "I want to be the world champion," she said, her voice so soft it was almost a whisper. "I *will* be the world champion. I want to participate in athletics and have a scholarship. Caster is making me proud. She won. She put our club on the map."

Caster Semenya, the current world champion in the eight hundred metres, was a member of the Moletjie Athletics Club until a year ago. She was born in Ga-Masehlong, a village about fifteen miles from the track, and she was, Coach Sako said, "a natural." Even before Semenya left Limpopo for college, in Pretoria, she had won a gold medal in her event at the 2008 Commonwealth Youth Games, in Pune, India, with a time of 2:04, eleven seconds behind the senior world record set by the Czech runner Jarmila Kratochvílová in 1983. "I used to tell Caster that she must try her level best," Sako said. "By performing the best, maybe good guys with big stomachs full of money will see her and then help her with schooling and the likes. That is the motivation." He added, "And she *always* tried her level best." Semenya won another gold medal in July, in Mauritius, at the African Junior Athletics Championships, lowering her time by a remarkable seven and a half seconds, to come in at 1:56.72. This beat the South African record for that event, held by Zola Budd, and qualified Semenya for her first senior competition, the 2009 World Championships, in Berlin.

Semenya won the eight-hundred-metre title by nearly two and a half seconds, finishing in 1:55.45. After the first lap of the race, she cruised past her competitors like a machine. She has a powerful stride and remarkable efficiency of movement: in footage of the World Championships, you can see the other runners thrashing behind her, but her trunk stays still, even as she is pumping her muscle-bound arms up and down. Her win looks effortless, inevitable. "Even when we were training, I used to pair her with the males," Sako told me. "I feel like she was too powerful for ladies." It was a stunning victory for Semenya, for the Moletjie Athletics Club, and for South Africa.

After the race, Semenya told reporters, "Oh, man, I don't know what to say. It's pretty good to win a gold medal and bring it home." (Her voice is surprising. As Semenya's father, Jacob, has put it, "If you speak to her on the telephone, you might mistake her for a man.") She continued, "I didn't know I could win that race, but for the first time in my life the experience, the World Championships . . ." She broke into a grin. "I couldn't believe it, man."

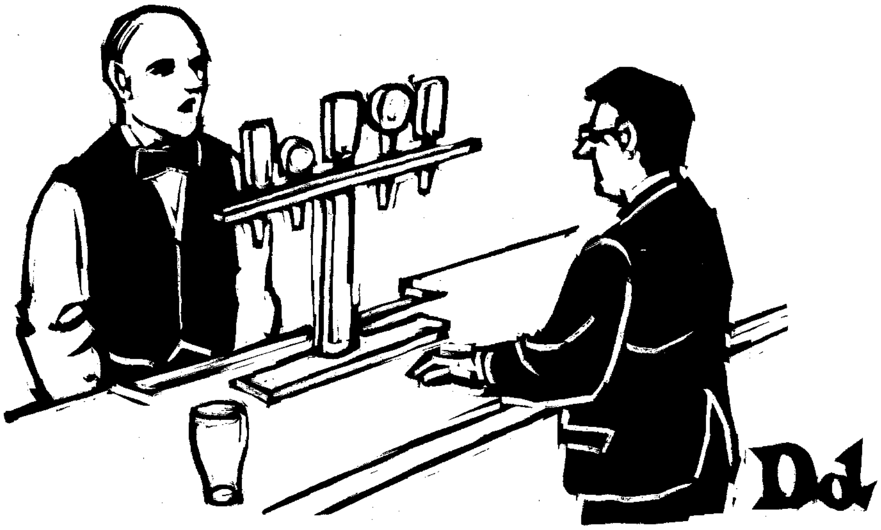
Since the day Semenya broke Zola Budd's record, people in South Africa had been talking about her. Semenya does not look like most female athletes. People questioned whether she was really a woman. Some even e-mailed the International Association of Athletics Federations, the worldwide governing body for track and field, with their doubts. Before Semenya was awarded her gold medal in Berlin, on August 20th, a reporter asked about a story that had been circulating at the Championships, that Semenya's sex was unclear and that she had been required to undergo gender-verification testing before the race. The I.A.A.F. confirmed the rumor, arguably in violation of its confidentiality policies. ("The choice is that you lie, which we don't like to do," Nick Davies, the communications director, told the New York *Times.*) The story ripped around the world. Several of Semenya's competitors in the race were incensed that she had been allowed to participate. "These kind of people should not run with us," Elisa Cusma, of Italy, who came in sixth, said. "For me, she is not a woman. She is a man."

"Just look at her," Mariya Savinova, of Russia, who finished fifth, said.

Semenya is breathtakingly butch. Her torso is like the chest plate on a suit of armor. She has a strong jawline, and a build that slides straight from her ribs to her hips. "What I knew is that wherever we go, whenever she made her first appearance, people were somehow gossiping, saying, 'No, no, she is not a girl,' " Phineas Sako said, rubbing the gray stubble on his chin. " 'It looks like a boy'—that's the right words—they used to say, 'It looks like a boy.' Some even asked me as a coach, and I would confirm: it's a girl. At times, she'd get upset. But, eventually, she was just used to such things." Semenya became accustomed to visiting the bathroom with a member of a competing team so that they could look at her private parts and then get on with the race. "They are doubting me," she would explain to her coaches, as she headed off the field toward the lavatory.

South Africa has eleven official languages. The majority of people in Limpopo speak the Pedi language, and many also speak English and Afrikaans, which schoolchildren were required to learn under apartheid. Sako's English was fluent but rough, and he frequently referred to Semenya as "he." "Caster was very free when he is in the male company," Sako said. "I remember one day I asked her, 'Why are you always in the company of men?' He said, 'No, man, I don't have something to say to girls, they talks nonsense. They are always out of order.' "

On September 11th, Australia's *Daily Telegraph*, a tabloid owned by Rupert Murdoch, reported that Semenya's test

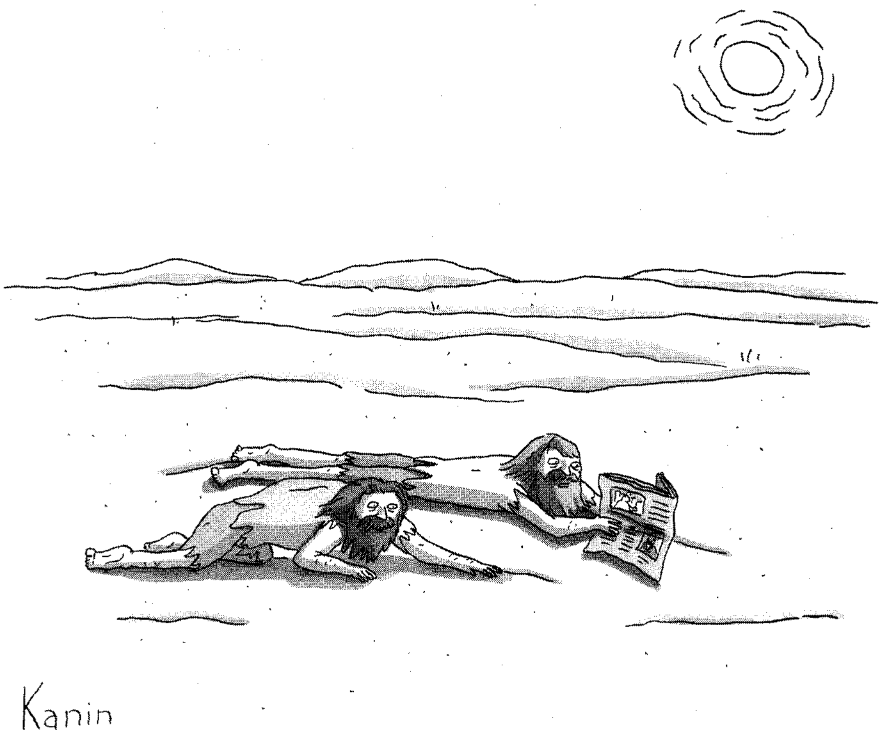


"You don't have to schedule a follow-up visit. You just come back whenever you want."

results had been leaked, and that they showed that Semenya, though she was brought up as a girl and had external female genitalia, did not have ovaries or a uterus. Semenya was born with undescended testes, the report said, which provided her with three times the amount of testosterone present in an average female—and so a potential advantage over competitors.

"I know what Caster has got," her aunt Johanna Lamola told the *Times*. "I've changed her nappies." Semenya's father said, "I don't even know how they do this gender testing. I don't know what a chromosome is. This is all very painful for us—we live by simple rules." Semenya did not cheat. She has not been evasive. It is very common for élite female athletes, who exert themselves to their physical limits as a matter of course, not to menstruate. There's no reason that Semenya or her coaches would have been alarmed if she were amenorrheic. "Maybe it's because we come from a disadvantaged area," Jeremiah Mokaba said. "They couldn't believe in us."

The I.A.A.F. has yet to inform Semenya whether she can continue running in international female competitions. I asked Sako what he thought would happen. "Caster," he said firmly, "will remain Caster."



"Good news—they found water on the moon."

• •

Sports have played an important role in modern South African history. A crucial part of the African National Congress's strategy to end apartheid during "the struggle," as everyone calls it, was to secure international condemnation of South Africa's government through boycotts and the banning of South African athletes from all international competitions. Conversely, during the 1995 rugby World Cup Nelson Mandela managed to unite the entire country behind the Springboks, the South African team, which had been a hated symbol of Afrikaner white supremacism. It was pivotal to his success in avoiding civil war and in establishing a new sense of national solidarity. Sports are "more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers," Mandela said. "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, the power to unite people that little else has." Sometimes it can unite people against other people. The South African Minister of Sport and Recreation, Makhenkesi Stofile, has warned, "If the I.A.A.F. expels or excludes Semenya from competition or withdraws the medal, I think it would be the Third World War."

In August, when Semenya returned from Germany, thousands of cheering supporters waited to welcome her at O. R. Tambo Airport, outside Johannesburg. President Jacob Zuma met with her to offer his congratulations, as did Nelson Mandela.

Phat Joe, one of the most famous radio d.j.s in the country, was fired by Kaya FM for suggesting on his show that Semenya might have testicles. Lolly Jackson, the owner of a chain of strip clubs called Teazers, put up an enormous billboard in a suburb of Johannesburg picturing a naked woman lying flat on her back above the words "No Need for Gender Testing!" Jackson subsequently claimed that the billboard had nothing to do with Semenya, but he sent her lawyers, at the firm of Dewey & LeBoeuf, a check for twenty thousand rand.

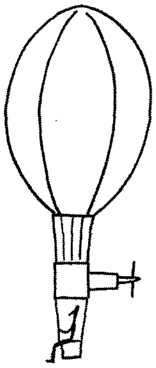
"I think it is the responsibility of South Africa to rally behind this child and tell the rest of the world she remains the hero she is and no one will take that away from her," Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, an ex-wife of Mandela's and a recently elected Member of Parliament, was quoted as saying in the London *Telegraph*. "There is nothing wrong with being a hermaphrodite. It is God's creation. She is God's child." By contrast, the African National Congress Youth League, a division of the African National Congress, issued a statement saying that it "will never accept the categorization of Caster Semenya as a hermaphrodite, because in South Africa and the entire world of sanity, such does not exist."

The African National Congress is part of the Tripartite Alliance, with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. This year's meeting of the Congress happened to coincide with Heritage Day, and many of the hundreds of delegates who assembled at a conference center outside Johannesburg were in traditional tribal dress. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela wore a Xhosa turban and cape. A representative from the police and prison workers' union, wearing nothing but a loincloth made from springbok pelts and a Swazi necklace of red pompoms, mingled with fellow union members at the back of an enormous auditorium, where delegates were debating the items of the day: whether to support the legalization of prostitution in time for the soccer World Cup, which South Africa will host in 2010, and whether to pass a resolution in support of Caster Semenya.

The sessions are meant to evoke the African tradition of villagers gathering to share opinions on local matters. Everyone gets to speak, though men speak much more than women. The prostitution question was examined from every angle: some were concerned about "the downgrading of our women by capitalism"; others felt that every source of income was desperately needed and that sex workers, like everybody else, deserved the protection of a union. After several hours, the delegates decided that what was needed was more discussion.

The South African Minister of Women, Children, and Persons with Disabilities, Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya, went to the lectern dressed in red Xhosa regalia to speak about "the issue of our young star, Caster Semenya." Everyone applauded. "She is our own," Mayende-Sibiya said. "She comes from the working class." The crowd blew horns in support, and some people ululated. "You cannot be silent! The human rights of Caster have been violated," she concluded. The resolution passed with unusual alacrity.

South Africans have been appalled by the idea of a person who thinks she is one thing suddenly being told that she is something else. The classification and reclassification of human beings has a haunted history in this country. Starting with the Population Registration Act of 1950, teams of white people were engaged as census-takers. They usually had no training, but they had the power to decide a person's race, and race determined where and with whom you could live, whether you could get a decent education, whether you had political representation, whether you were even free to walk in certain areas at certain hours. The categories were fickle. In 1985, according to the census, more than a thousand people somehow changed race: nineteen whites turned Colored (as South Africans call people of mixed heritage); seven hundred and two Coloreds turned white, fifty Indians turned Colored, eleven Colored turned Chinese, and so on. (No blacks turned white, or vice versa.)



Taxonomy is an acutely sensitive subject, and its history is probably one of the reasons that South Africans—particularly black South Africans—have rallied behind their runner with such fervor. The government has decreed that Semenya can continue running with women in her own country, regardless of what the I.A.A.F. decides.

South Africans have compared the worldwide fascination with Semenya's gender to the dubious fame of another South African woman whose body captivated Europeans: Saartjie Baartman, the Hottentot Venus. Baartman, an orphan born on the rural Eastern Cape, was the servant of Dutch farmers near Cape Town. In 1810, they sent her to Europe to be exhibited in front of painters, naturalists, and oglers, who were fascinated by her unusually large buttocks and had heard rumors of her long labia. She supposedly became a prostitute and an alcoholic, and she died in France in her mid-twenties. Until 1974, her skeleton and preserved genitals were displayed at the Musée de l'Homme, in Paris. Many South Africans feel that white foreigners are yet again scrutinizing a black female body as though it did not contain a human being.

Mayende-Sibiya has asked that the United Nations get involved in Semenya's case, and I asked her what she thought it could do. "I would like to see it getting more information from the I.A.A.F.," she said over lunch at the Congress. "We wrote to the I.A.A.F. to ask a number of questions, including what precedents informed the action that it took on Caster. Why pick up on her? What were the reasons? The I.A.A.F. has not responded, and that to me raises questions on how it conducts business." Mayende-Sibiya is a big, warm woman, a grandmother and a former nurse, who hugs everyone she meets. She sighed. "There is a lot that has gone wrong in this process."

The I.A.A.F. has behaved erratically on the issue. On November 19th, the South African Ministry of Sport and Recreation announced that the I.A.A.F. had said that Semenya could keep her medal, but the I.A.A.F. refused to confirm this. Its president, Lamine Diack, was scheduled to visit South Africa several weeks ago to talk to Semenya and to representatives of the government, but he cancelled his trip at the last minute. In late October, I got in touch with the I.A.A.F., with questions about Semenya, and received a form-letter reply (dated September 11th) that it would not comment on the case until after its council meeting, at the end of November. Then, a few hours later, Nick Davies, the director of communications, wrote back by e-mail:

> Two things triggered the investigation. Firstly, the incredible improvement in this athlete's performance . . . and more bluntly, the fact that SOUTH AFRICAN sport Web sites were alleging that she was a hermaphrodite athlete. One such blog (from sport24.co.za) stated, "Caster Semenya is an interesting revelation because the 18 year old was born a hermaphrodite and, through a series of tests, has been classified as female." With this blatant allegation, and bearing in mind the almost supernatural improvement, the I.A.A.F. believed that it was sensible to make sure, with help of A.S.A., that the athlete was negative in terms of doping test results, and also that there was no gender ambiguity which may have allowed her to have the benefits of male hormone levels, whilst competing against other women.

A.S.A. is the abbreviation for Athletics South Africa, the national governing body in charge of track and field. The group's president, Leonard Chuene, who was also on the board of the I.A.A.F., and had been in Berlin for the Championships, told reporters when he returned, "We are not going to allow Europeans to define and describe our children." South Africa would have no part in tests conducted by "some stupid university somewhere," Chuene, who also happens to be from Limpopo, said. "The only scientists I believe in are the parents of this child." He claimed to be shocked by the way that the I.A.A.F. had treated Semenya, and he resigned from the board in protest before he left Berlin. (A week later, Chuene wrote the I.A.A.F. a letter saying that his resignation had been hasty, and asked to be reinstated.)

In fact, Chuene was not only aware of the Berlin tests; he had authorized them, and, at the urging of the I.A.A.F., he had also had Semenya tested before she left Pretoria. On August 3rd, the I.A.A.F.'s anti-doping administrator, Dr. Gabriel Dollé, had sent an e-mail to Harold Adams, A.S.A.'s team doctor, citing the Web-site posting that Nick Davies mentioned to me, which alleged that Semenya

"I hope that what you're reading is relevant to the business at hand."

• •

is a "hermaphrodite . . . classified as female." Dollé asked Adams if sex verification had been conducted—or ought to be. (Debora Patta, the host of a South African investigative program called "3rd Degree," obtained the e-mail exchange and forwarded it to me.) Adams then sent the following e-mail to Leonard Chuene and A.S.A.'s general manager, Molatelo Malehopo:

> After thinking about the current confidential matter I would suggest we make the following decisions.
>
> 1. We get a gynae opinion and take it to Berlin.
>
> 2. We do nothing and I will handle these issues if they come up in Berlin. Please think and get back to me A.S.A.P.

Malehopo replied the same day, agreeing to the exam. Semenya was taken to the Medforum Medi-Clinic, in Pretoria, for tests by a gynecologist.

"They did not even consult us as parents," Semenya's mother, Dorcus, told the *Star,* a South African daily. "They acted like thieves. They did whatever they wanted to do with our child without informing us."

On August 8th, Adams and Semenya flew to Germany to join the rest of the South African team and the A.S.A. staff at the training camp. Adams, who is also one of President Zuma's personal physicians, told Chuene that the Pretoria test results were "not good." He recommended that they withdraw Semenya from the competition, rather than subject her to further testing.

"The reason for my advice was that the tests might prove too traumatic for Ms. Semenya to handle, especially without the necessary support of family and friends around her," Harold Adams wrote in a subsequent report to Parliament. "The other reason was that being tested at the World Championships would not give her enough time to consult extensively and perhaps arrive at a decision to refuse the testing."

Leonard Chuene did not take Adams's advice. Instead, Semenya ran in a qualifying heat on August 16th and then in the semifinals, the next day. After her success in the semifinals, a television reporter outside the stadium blurted out, "With that comes rumors. I heard one that you were born a man?" The video is very hard to watch. As the reporter speaks, Semenya's breathing quickens, and she appears to be on the verge of panic. Then she looks at the ground and says, "I have no idea about that thing. . . . I don't give a damn about it," and walks away from the cameras. August 18th was supposed to be a rest day before the finals. Semenya spent it undergoing a second round of tests. The next day, after two weeks of confusion and scrutiny, Semenya won the gold medal.

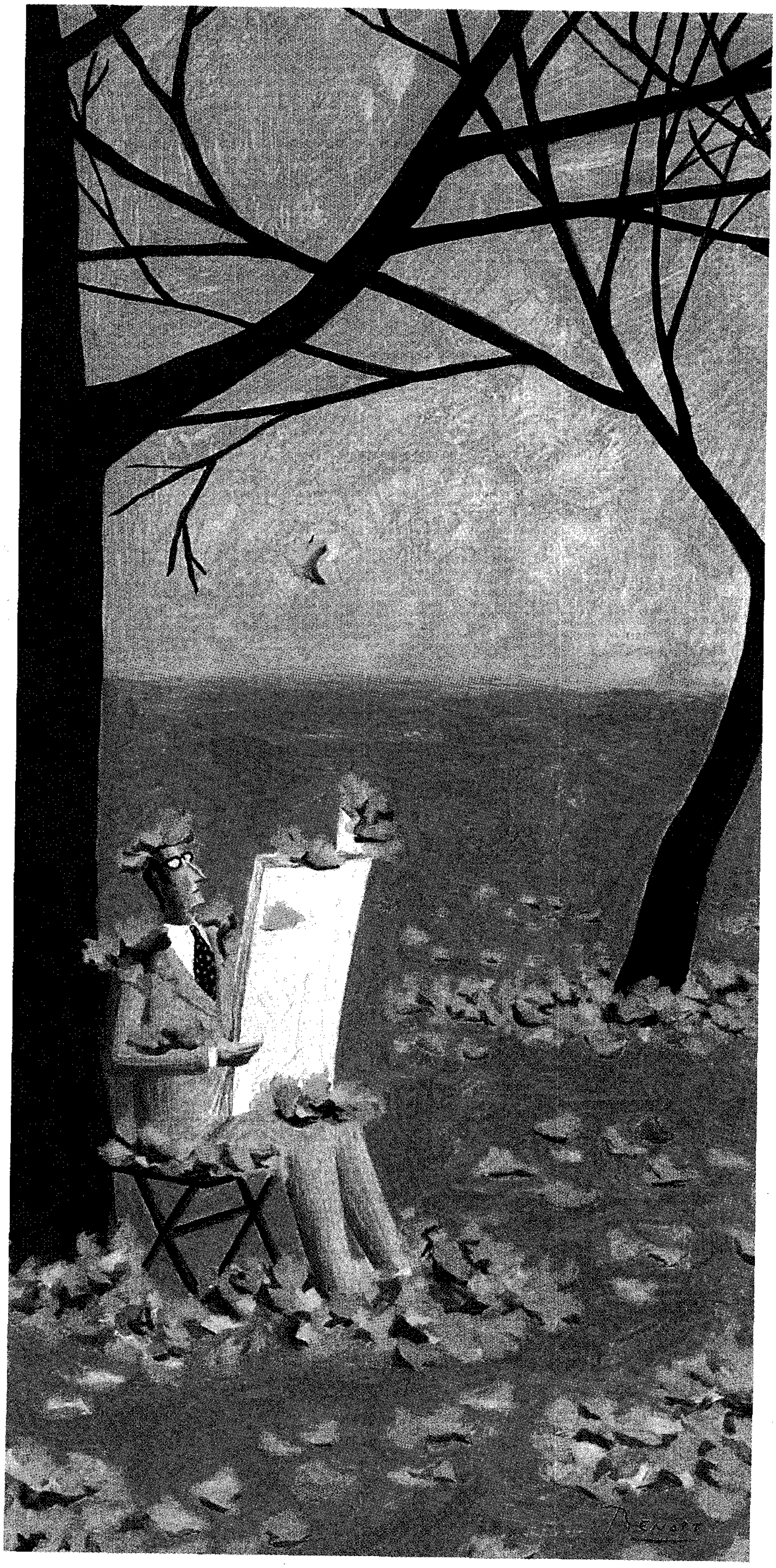
In September, the Johannesburg weekly *Mail & Guardian* exposed Chuene's dishonesty about authorizing the tests in Pretoria and Berlin. Chuene contends that he was simply following I.A.A.F. procedure, and that his deceit was a well-intentioned attempt to maintain confidentiality. After the story broke, he held a press conference to apologize for lying to the nation, but the apology was not unconditional. "Tell me someone," he said, "who has not lied to protect a child."

Semenya is back at the University of Pretoria now, training with her coach, Michael Seme. I asked Seme how he thought she was doing. "Sometimes you can look at somebody thinking he is O.K.," Seme said. "But you find out in his heart, maybe it is complaining. I can't see what's happening in her heart."

At a meeting of the British Gynaecological Society on April 25, 1888, Dr. Fancourt Barnes declared that he had "in the next room a living specimen of a hermaphrodite." The person was nineteen years old, and had always believed that she was female. Barnes thought otherwise. He cited "1) the appearance of the head, 2) the *timbre* of the voice, 3) the nondevelopment of the breasts," and "the utter absence of anything like a uterus or ovaries," as evidence of the subject's insufficient femininity.

Other members of the society who ex-

SKETCHBOOK BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS



amined the patient disagreed. Dr. James Aveling asserted that "the face was feminine, the throat was decidedly that of a woman." Dr. Charles Henry Felix Routh argued that Barnes's diagnosis was "guess work," and claimed that "the mere fact" that this patient might not have a uterus was "no argument against its being a woman." (Routh was not entirely convinced that the patient lacked a uterus and suggested that unless Barnes tried to "pass his entire hand into her rectum" they could not be sure.) Dr. Heywood Smith finally "suggested that the Society should divide on the question of sex," and so it did. Before the doctors sent their patient home with her mother, they took a photograph. In the foreground, a "medical man" holds the "living specimen"'s genitals with his thumb and forefinger for the camera, between her spread legs. In the background is the blurred image of the subject's head, not quite obscured by the blanket that covers her torso. The subject's face is grainy, but it is set in an unmistakable expression of powerless panic.

The society's inability to reach consensus was due, in part, to its failure to locate either testicles or ovaries in the patient. Until 1915, that was the generally accepted determining factor for sex. In "Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex," Alice Domurat Dreger calls the period from 1870 to 1915 "the Age of Gonads."

The way doctors, scientists, and sports officials have determined sex has changed radically over the years. Before 1968, the International Olympic Committee verified the sex of female athletes by looking between their legs. Athletes complained about these humiliating inspections—which weren't always conclusive—and, for the 1968 Olympics, in Mexico City, the I.O.C. decided to implement chromosomal testing. (There were rumors that some men from Eastern Bloc nations had plans to masquerade as women.) These assessments proved problematic, too.

In normal human development, when a zygote has XY, or male, chromosomes, the SRY—sex-determining region Y—gene on the Y chromosome "instructs" the zygote's protogonads to develop as testes, rather than as ovaries. The testes then produce testosterone, which issues a second set of developmental instructions:

for a scrotal sac to develop and for the testes to descend into it, for a penis to grow, and so on. But the process can get derailed. A person can be born with one ovary and one testicle. The SRY gene can end up on an X chromosome. A person with a penis who thinks he is male can one day find out that he has a uterus and ovaries. "Then, there is chromosomal variability that is invisible," Anne Fausto-Sterling, the author of "Sexing the Body," told me. "You could go your whole life and never know."

All sorts of things can happen, and do. An embryo that is chromosomally male but suffers from an enzyme deficiency that partially prevents it from "reading" testosterone can develop into a baby who appears female. Then, at puberty, the person's testes will produce a rush of hormones and this time the body won't need the enzyme (called 5-alpha-reductase) to successfully read the testosterone. The little girl will start to become hairier and more muscular. Her voice may deepen, and her testes may descend into what she thought were her labia. Her clitoris will grow into something like a penis. Is she still a girl? Was she ever?

If a chromosomally male embryo has androgen-insensitivity syndrome, or A.I.S., the cells' receptors for testosterone, an androgen, are deaf to the testosterone's instructions, and will thus develop the default external sexual characteristics of a female. An individual with androgen-insensitivity syndrome has XY chromosomes, a vagina, and undescended testes, but her body develops without the ability to respond to the testosterone it produces. In fact, people with complete A.I.S. are less able to process testosterone than average women. Consequently, they tend to have exceptionally "smooth-skinned bodies with rounded hips and breasts and long limbs," Dreger writes in "Hermaphrodites."

People with incomplete A.I.S., on the other hand, could end up looking and sounding like Caster Semenya. Their bodies hear *some* of the instructions that the testosterone inside them is issuing. But that does not necessarily mean that they would have an athletic advantage.

For example, the Spanish hurdler Maria Patiño, who had A.I.S., went to the World University Games in Kobe, Japan, in 1985, and forgot to bring a letter from her doctor verifying that she was female. Until 1999, gender verification was compulsory for all female athletes. Officials scraped some cells from the inside of her cheek for chromatin testing. If visual inspection had still been the standard, Patiño's gender never would have been questioned. Her genitals, and the rest of her, looked female, but according to the test she was male. The story got out, and she was stripped of her past titles. Her boyfriend left her. Her scholarship was revoked, and she was evicted from the national athletic residence.

In 1991, the International Association of Athletics Federations abandoned this method as unreliable, and, nine years later, so did the International Olympic Committee. Patiño was requalified in 1988, when she was able to prove that her body could not make use of its testosterone, and that she had developed as a woman. "I knew I was a woman," Patiño said, "in the eyes of medicine, God, and most of all in my own eyes."

The approach that the I.A.A.F. appears to be taking in its review of Semenya's test results from Berlin is not unlike the British Gynaecological Society's muddled attempt to determine the sex of its living specimen. The I.A.A.F.'s gender policy states that an athlete "can be asked to attend a medical evaluation before a panel comprising gynecologist, endocrinologist, psychologist, internal medicine specialist, expert on gender/transgender issues." It has not come up with a single litmus test for sex; its goal, like that of the I.O.C. in such situations, is to reach consensus. The federation does not define the criteria that its group of experts must use to reach their determination, however. "It seems to be working with a kind of 'I know it when I see it' policy," Dreger, a professor of clinical medical humanities and bioethics at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, told me. The policy does not indicate who should be tested and on what grounds. An athlete will be examined if "there is any 'suspicion' or if there is a 'challenge' " to her sex. Evidently, a blog post qualifies as a challenge.

In conjunction with other sports bodies, the I.A.A.F. will hold a special conference, in January, 2010, to review the policy. On November 18th, it sent out a press release stating that there would be "no discussion of Caster Semenya's case" at the November council meeting, despite its earlier promise to resolve the issue there.

Unfortunately for I.A.A.F. officials, they are faced with a question that no one has ever been able to answer: what is the ultimate difference between a man and a woman? "This is not a solvable problem," Alice Dreger said. "People always press me: 'Isn't there one marker we can use?' No. We couldn't then and we can't now, and science is making it more difficult and not less, because it ends up showing us how much blending there is and how many nuances, and it becomes impossible to point to one thing, or even a set of things, and say that's what it means to be male."

In 2000, Anne Fausto-Sterling, a professor of biology at Brown University, conducted what remains the study of record on the frequency of intersexuality, and concluded that 1.7 per cent of the population develops in a way that deviates from the standard definition of male or female. (Some scholars have argued that Fausto-Sterling's categories are too broad, because they include individuals who show no noticeable expression of their chromosomal irregularity.) Based on this figure, intersexuality is much more common than Down syndrome or albinism, though it can be harder to keep track of: every baby born in the United States is registered as "male" or "female."

The word "hermaphrodite" is as outdated and offensive to the people it once described as the word "mulatto." In one Greek myth, Hermes, the son of Zeus, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, have a child endowed with all the attributes of both of them. "Hermaphrodite" implies a double-sexed creature, fully male and fully female, which is a physical impossibility for human beings. (You can be half and half, but you can't be all and all.)

In the nineteen-nineties, a movement spearheaded by an activist who used to call herself Cheryl Chase, and now goes by the name Bo Laurent, insisted that what was needed was a new identity. Chase founded the Intersex Society of North America (now defunct) to draw attention to the frequently tragic consequences of doctors' performing irreversible surgery on newborns to enforce a sex—one that the baby might just as easily as not grow up to reject. The society advocated assigning intersex children a gender at birth but leaving their bodies intact, so that upon adulthood they could make their own choices about whether they wished to undergo surgical modification.

Then something unexpected happened. "The intersex identity started getting inhabited by people who weren't really intersex," Dreger said. "The people who accumulated around the intersex identity tended to be queer and out and comfortable with this identity outside the gender binary." They felt that refraining from interfering with infants' ambiguous genitalia was the first step on a desirable path to dissolving gender altogether. To them, this idea was "as politically inspiring as it is utterly disconnected from the actual experience of intersex people or the heart-wrenching decisions their parents have to make when an intersex child is born," as Vernon A. Rosario, a professor of psychiatry at U.C.L.A., put it in a recent issue of *The Gay and Lesbian Review.*

Semenya, whether she wants to be or not, has become a hero to many people who "don't fit the sex and gender boxes," as Jarvis, from Winnipeg, posted on the Web site casterrunsforme.com. A person named Megan Ewart wrote, "I'll bet you've got a lot more transgendered allies than just me that are feeling your pain."

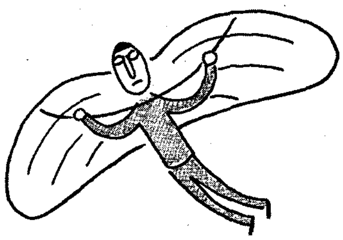
Now there is an even newer term of art for people born with ambiguously sexed bodies who do not wish to be connected with the "L.G.B.T.Q.I."—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex—camp: "disorders of sex development," or D.S.D. By naming the condition a medical "disorder," advocates of the D.S.D. label hope to make the people it describes seem less aberrant. "Oddly enough, it does normalize it in a certain way," Fausto-Sterling said. "It's putting it on the same plane as other anomalous development—like congenital anomalies of the heart." Advocates of the D.S.D. label are not seeking to create a third sex. Rather, they want disorders of sex development to be treated like any other physical abnormality: something for doctors to monitor but not to operate on, unless the patient is in physical discomfort or danger.

In science and medicine, categories are imperative, but they are also inflected by social concerns. "Mammals," for example, were so named by Linnaeus, in the eighteenth century, because their females produce milk to suckle their young. Was it irrelevant that scientists like Linnaeus sought to encourage mothers to breast-feed their own children, and to do away with the "unnatural" custom of wet-nursing? "There are philosophers of science who argue that when scientists make categories in the natural world—shapes, species—they are simply making a list of things that exist: natural kinds," Fausto-Sterling said. "It's scientist as discoverer. The phrase that people use is 'cutting nature at its joint.' There are other people, myself included, who think that, almost always, what we're doing in biology is creating categories that work pretty well for certain things that we want to do with them. But there is no joint."

THE BIG SLEEP

The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is
diversion, and yet it is the greatest of our miseries.
—Pascal.

On Turner Classic Movies Philip Marlowe
is grimacing at the slinky beauty
of the woman who will become
the wife of the actor playing him.
The man playing me, up at three this morning,
worrying about the cost of private school,
health insurance, and the slow grinding
away of his savings, is wearing
bleaching molds because a stain chart
listed his smile as second to worst.
On CNN quaint dioramas of Baghdad,
the Sudan, and Gaza depict recent forms
of human misery. Is there a chart
that measures our ignorance and vanity?
On PBS philosophers are debating what
Nietzsche meant by our desire to create
beyond ourselves the purest will.
The sexual fire in the amber eyes
of the woman Lauren Bacall is playing,
perhaps? On the Western Channel
the whiteness of Joel McCrae's teeth
has survived dust storms, chewing tobacco,
and his character's nostalgia for



If sex is not precisely definable, how else might sports be organized? Theoretically, athletes could be categorized by size, as they are in wrestling and boxing. But then women would usually lose to men. Or athletes could be categorized by skill level. Almost always, this would mean that the strongest élite female athletes would compete against the weakest élite male athletes, which would be pretty demoralizing all the way around.

Another option would be to divide athletes biochemically. Testosterone is, for an athlete, truly important stuff. Developmentally, testosterone spurs linear bone growth in adolescents. Fully grown people use testosterone in doping because it helps create muscle mass and increases red-blood-cell production, which, in turn, increases cellular oxygen-carrying capacity. The more oxygen an athlete has in her cells, the more efficiently her muscles op-

the brutality of his tiny moment. Some believe
we've consumed our originality,
that our diorama will depict nothing.
On the Disney Channel all fifty-six signers
of the Declaration of Independence
are shouting about the indignity of domination
for everyone except perhaps those
tending their fields and children.
Did the man playing Nietzsche grow weary
of trying to grow happiness out of pure will?
Hat over heart, the man playing my father
stood perpendicular to his exhausted,
uneducated, immigrant shadow, weeping
to our national anthem. A man stood for something,
he said. Did the actor playing Marlowe
understand that Marlowe stood for nothing?
On the History Channel men and beasts
are being slaughtered by machetes, explosions,
and hangings, their swollen, mystified bodies
falling into ravines, dropping to their knees
screaming for their mothers and God to save them.
It's three in the morning and everywhere
around me the silence stands for nothing
and even the god playing God wants to sleep.

—*Philip Schultz*

erate and the longer it takes for her body to start producing lactic acid, the substance that causes cramps and pain. Testosterone makes a faster, better athlete, and enables a body to recover more quickly from exhaustion. Hypothetically, according to Eric Vilain, a professor of human genetics and pediatrics at U.C.L.A., those with a certain level of functional testosterone (testosterone that the body can actually make use of) could be in one group, and those below it could be in another. Although the first group would be almost all male and the second group would be almost all female, the division would be determined not by gender but by actual physical advantages that gender supposedly, yet unreliably, supplies.

But, setting aside the issue of gender, there is still no such thing as a level playing field in sports. Different bodies have physical attributes, even abnormalities, that may provide a distinct advantage in one sport or another. The N.B.A., for instance, has had several players with acromegaly—the overproduction of growth hormone. Michael Phelps, who has won fourteen Olympic gold medals, has unusually long arms and is said to have double-jointed elbows, knees, and ankles. Is Caster Semenya's alleged extra testosterone really so different?

There is much more at stake in organizing sports by gender than just making things fair. If we were to admit that at some level we don't know the difference between men and women, we might start to wonder about the way we've organized our entire world. Who gets to use what bathroom? Who is allowed to get married? (Currently, the United States government recognizes the marriage of a woman to a female-to-male transsexual who has had a double mastectomy and takes testosterone tablets but still has a vagina, but not to a woman who hasn't done those things.) We depend on gender to make sense of sexuality, society, and ourselves. We do not wish to see it dissolve.

What the I.A.A.F. concludes about Caster Semenya could have ramifications for sports in general and for South Africa in particular. This is true not only because it is Semenya's place of origin. South Africa has an unusually high level of intersex births. Nobody knows why.

During apartheid, for every white town there was a black township. Only the white towns appeared on maps, though the townships were nearly always more populous. John Carlin, in his account of the 1995 rugby World Cup, "Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game That Made a Nation," describes townships as "the black shadows of the towns." Khayelitsha is the black shadow of Cape Town. According to the most recent census, half a million people live there, but in reality the number is probably much higher. Many of their parents and grandparents settled in the Cape Flats, outside of Cape Town, after the Group Areas Acts of the nineteen-fifties made it illegal for them to live in the city. "Khayelitsha" is Xhosa for "New Home." Shacks made of corrugated tin, cardboard, and scrap wood, many without electricity or running water, sprawl for miles along mostly unmarked dirt roads, punctuated by beauty parlors and fruit stands in structures no bigger than British telephone booths.

By Khayelitsha standards, Funeka Soldaat's small home, with its solid brick walls and tiled floor, is very fine. Soldaat is an L.G.B.Q.T.I. activist. Both she and a cousin—whom Soldaat, following local custom, referred to as her sister—were born with anomalous genitalia, and both underwent "corrective" partial clitoridectomies when they were young, which they now regret. This is the standard "treatment" for babies born with a clitoris longer than one centimetre but smaller than 2.5 centimetres, at which point it becomes a medically acceptable penis. The scar tissue that forms after such a procedure can impede sensation for the rest of a person's life.

"My sister, she look just like Caster," Soldaat said, smiling. "She don't have the breasts. She never get a period. Everybody thinks she's a guy, just like Caster. We call them, in Xhosa, *italasi*. It is not a new thing—everybody has a word for it." That there is a name for intersex does not mean it is a condition that is ever spoken about. "One thing that is so difficult for African people: there's no way that you can discuss about something that's happened below the belt," Soldaat said. "All the time you don't know what's happening in your body, and there's nobody that try to explain to you. *Then* it becomes a problem. If my mom would know that I'm intersex and there's nothing wrong about it, then there was nothing going to make me panic."

Particularly in remote areas, where babies tend to be born in the presence of a mother, a grandmother, and maybe a midwife, it is easy to keep a baby's genitalia a secret. People want to insulate their children from the shame of being different, so they simply pretend that they are not. "Limpopo and Eastern Cape are the high incidence of intersex people," Soldaat said. "And when you grow up in the rural areas it's a mess, because people don't even go to doctors." The determination of gender is made very simply. "It depends what they do when they go to the loo," Soldaat said. "That's what makes their children to be women. If they go to the loo and they sit, that's it."

On her coffee table, Soldaat had a photocopy of the South African magazine *You*, which featured a photo spread showing Caster Semenya dressed in high heels and a short skirt, her hair fluffed out and her face made up. Her expression was painfully uncomfortable, and the pictures were garish.

"My sister was crying when she saw this whole thing on paper," Soldaat said, flipping through the pages. "It's a disaster. She look like a drag queen! I can just imagine her at night when she's alone, looking at these pictures."

Soldaat tossed the papers on the floor. "When we are really, really poor sometimes, and we really, really want to protect ourselves, people take an advantage," she said. "That's why it was easy for people to force her to do this, for A.S.A. to do this." Athletics South Africa received a payment from *You* in exchange for Semenya's appearance in its pages. "To say that she enjoyed doing this, that's a lie! There is no way. There is no way!"

Soldaat has a shaved head and was wearing big jeans and a baseball cap with the words "Mama Cash," the name of a Dutch women's-rights organization, on it. She is a lesbian, and she said that she suspected Semenya is, too.

"Everyone! Everyone who is like this likes women," Soldaat said, laughing. "Everyone!" ("Caster has never cared about men other than as friends," her father told a reporter. "Her sisters were always after boys in the way that I, too, was always after girls when I was younger. But Caster has never been interested in any of that.") If Soldaat is right, then Semenya's life may well get more difficult. Soldaat was going to court later that day to listen to the proceedings against several men accused of raping and murdering a lesbian in Khayelitsha. "They are raping lesbians to correct them," she said. "In order they can be a proper woman."

Soldaat said that Semenya should run with women. "It will never be like intersex women have their own Olympic Games—that's ridiculous!" she said. Soldaat has a big, raucous laugh, and the idea of that imaginary competition absolutely killed her. Soldaat was a runner herself when she was young. "If she can't run in the Olympics, Caster has to continue running with other girls in South Africa. Because, really, that's what she wants, that's what she is, that's what keeps her alive: that's running."

The only thing more slippery than the science in the Semenya case is the agendas of the men who have involved themselves in it. There is a bounty of political gain for whoever spins the story most successfully.

Julius Malema, the president of the A.N.C. Youth League, has said that he does not believe in the existence of intersex people, and has tried to frame the concept as a suspect and unwelcome import from abroad. "Hermaphrodite, what is that?" Malema asked at a press conference in October. "Somebody tell me, what is 'hermaphrodite' in Pedi? There's no such thing. So don't impose your hermaphrodite concepts on us." (The word is *tarasi*, according to a professor of South African languages at Yale.) The Youth League issued a press release decrying a "racist attack on Semenya" orchestrated by the media in "Australia, which is the most lucrative destination for South Africa's racists and fascists who refused to live under a black democratic government."

Julius Malema is not known for being levelheaded. He won the presidency of the Youth League in a highly contested election in 2008. Just a few months later, while Jacob Zuma was fending off charges of racketeering and fraud (the charges have since been dropped), Malema became notorious for vowing, "We are prepared to die for Zuma. Not only that, we are prepared to take up arms and kill for Zuma." (Zuma also beat a rape charge, in 2006.) Zuma has called Malema "a leader in the making," worthy of "inheriting the A.N.C." one day. Malema has demonstrated an ability to mobilize people and an almost reckless willingness to use charges of racism to do so. He has been Leonard Chuene's most steadfast defender.

Chuene has, since the revelation of his deceit, become almost as controversial a figure in South Africa as Caster Semenya. Countless editorials have accused Chuene of sacrificing her in his quest for a gold medal and have demanded his ouster. In Dr. Harold Adams's report to Parliament, he calls Chuene's decision "short-sighted and grossly irresponsible." Though Chuene received a vote of confidence from Athletics South Africa's board after his admission, the A.N.C. asked him to apologize; its rival party, the Democratic Alliance, demanded his resignation, and the Deputy Minister of Sport called him a liar. Minister Mayende-Sibiya told me that Chuene's behavior was "totally unacceptable."

Julius Malema has continued to paint any criticism of Chuene as racist. In early October, one of A.S.A.'s biggest sponsors, Nedbank, announced that it would withdraw its support pending a change in A.S.A.'s leadership. Malema retaliated by calling for a boycott of the bank. "We will teach them a lesson about the power of the masses," Malema said. "They may have money, but we can defeat them because we have the masses."

On three occasions, Leonard Chuene's personal assistant made an appointment for me to interview "the president," as she calls her boss. She always called or e-mailed at the last minute to cancel. We had several calls scheduled, but Chuene never picked up his phone at the appointed time. Then, one day, I got on an airplane going to Polokwane, a small northern city. Sitting in an empty row, in a navy blazer and pressed jeans, was Leonard Chuene.

Chuene wanted to know how I recognized him. Only minutes before, I had been looking at his photograph in a newspaper, alongside a story about Nedbank's withdrawal of funds from A.S.A. and A.S.A.'s failing finances. "I have become more famous than Caster," he said, and chuckled. Chuene has a shiny bald head and a little gut. He was once a serious runner and has completed more than a hundred marathons, he told me. He said he had no choice but to get Semenya tested. "You cannot just argue like a fool and say no. This is not the law of the jungle!" He speaks very quickly. He explained why he had not heeded Adams's advice to withdraw Semenya from the race.

"I don't have the results in my hand!" he said. "How did you expect me to take an informed decision?"

Indeed, Adams had had word from the Pretoria clinic but no actual documentation of the test results. "Where is the evidence?" Chuene said. "Now I come back home and they will say, 'When this black child from the rural be No. 1, why do you deprive her?' "

Chuene shrugged. "They say I lied. That's what they are saying. I said no. There is confidentiality! I.A.A.F. is in trouble for breaching that. Who was going to be Leonard to say that?" The engines started roaring as the small plane took off. "It was 22-Catch situation!" Chuene shouted over the noise. "If I will do this, it's 'Why did you withdraw her?' If I did not, 'Why did you allow her to run?' Whatever way you look at it, I'm judged. I'm judged!"

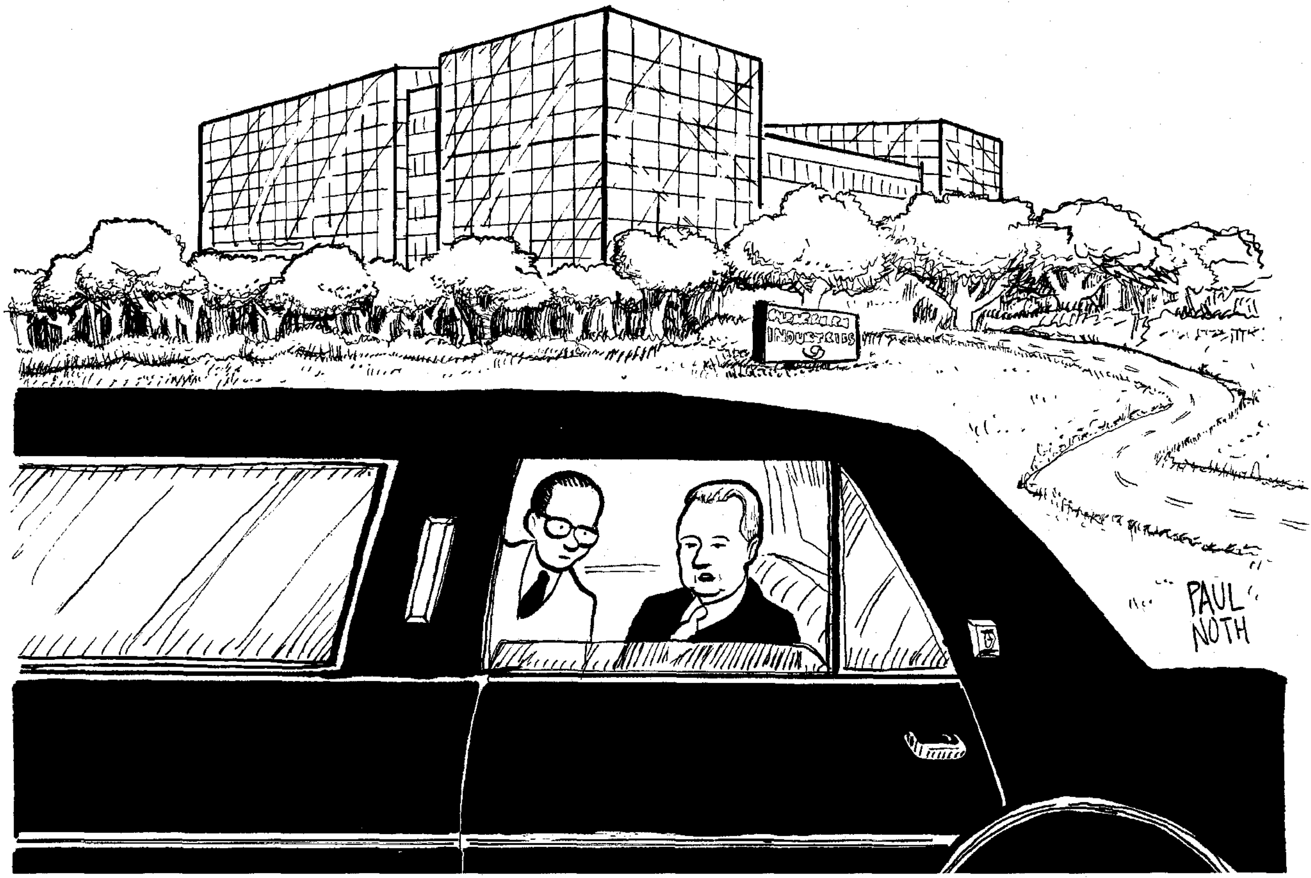
There were around twenty people on the plane. We were airborne, and the engines quieted. Chuene did not. "The stupid leader is the one who says, 'I'm not sure; I don't know.' I had to take a decision! She must run. If Chuene didn't allow her, it meant she was going to stay in South Africa. This thing has given her more opportunity! Everybody knows her. The world is out there to say, 'Your problems are our problems.' Imagine if I had not let her win!" As we touched down in Polokwane, he said, "If there is to be help, it is because of the opportunity created by Leonard Chuene."

Recently, Semenya told the *Guardian*, "It's not so easy. The university is O.K. but there is not many other places I can go. People want to stare at me now. They want to touch me. I'm supposed to be famous." She added, "I don't think I like it so much."

The law firm Dewey & LeBoeuf announced in September that it was taking on Caster Semenya as a client. It is still sorting through what happened and deciding whom to sue. One afternoon, I drove with Benedict Phiri, an associate in the firm's Johannesburg office, across the Blood River from Polokwane to Ga-Masehlong to meet Semenya's mother. Ga-Masehlong is a small village dotted with jacaranda trees; goats graze on the garbage and the grass on the roadsides. The houses have tin roofs, and people put rocks on top of them to keep them from blowing away. There are satellite dishes in several yards, but most people have dug their own wells and collect firewood from the bush for cooking. Everyone knows everyone else in Ga-Masehlong, and it was easy to get directions to the house of the champion.

At the Semenya home, there was a flyer tacked to the front door promoting a lecture that Julius Malema was giving at the local elementary school. Phiri knocked. We heard shuffling and then the sound of locks turning and bolts sliding. Phiri called out that he was Caster's lawyer, but nobody came to the door.

A few minutes later, a pretty girl wearing an orange fleece jacket walked into the yard and introduced herself as Maphela. She said she was fourteen. "Do



"Johnson, look at the lilies of the field. They neither spin nor toil. Fire them."

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you want my story?" she asked in English. "I am Caster's sister! But I am not like her. I am different from Caster." I asked her what she meant, and Maphela replied emphatically, "I am not that way."

Maphela looked toward the window where her mother, Dorcus, was hiding her face behind the curtain and motioning vigorously for her daughter to stop speaking with us. We asked Maphela if she would tell her mother that Phiri was Caster's lawyer. Maphela ran off toward the back door.

We sat on the stoop of a cooking hut in the Semenyas' front yard, and waited with the chickens and the goats. An elderly neighbor named Ike came into the yard. "Caster has done a wonderful thing," he said. "This has brought to mind when the Philistines were persecuting the Israelites." Ike told us that he just wanted to check on the family and see how their visit from Julius Malema the previous evening had gone. This made Phiri nervous.

After a few minutes, Maphela returned. She told us that her mother would not meet with Phiri, because she did not agree that Caster should have a lawyer.

As we drove away through the bush, Phiri called his boss in Johannesburg, a white former rugby player named Greg Nott. I could hear Nott yelling through the phone. "We knew this would happen all along," Phiri said, trying to calm him. "Julius Malema is Chuene's ally, and Julius is giving Caster money."

On the occasion of the A.N.C. Youth League's sixty-fifth anniversary, in October, Julius Malema presented Caster Semenya with a hundred and twenty thousand rand (about sixteen thousand dollars) at a gala dinner in Johannesburg. "I can even see it," Phiri said on the phone. "They probably told the mom, 'People will come and say they're her lawyer. Don't believe it.' " Phiri was afraid that Malema would step in and persuade the family to side with Chuene, who comes from the same region, and whose interests might not be served by lawyers poking around. One of the first things that Dewey & LeBoeuf did when the firm took the case was to ask both A.S.A. and the I.A.A.F. to provide documentation of the tests and any other pertinent paperwork; neither organization has fully complied.

The firm is representing Semenya pro bono, so good publicity will be its only reward. "And that," Phiri said, "could blow up in our faces."

Nobody wants Chuene out of office more than an old friend and colleague named Wilfred Daniels, who started at A.S.A. with him, sixteen years ago. "From day one we connected, in the struggle days, you know?" Daniels said. "We were like, we *belong* together." Both Daniels, fifty-eight, and Chuene, fifty-seven, grew up as promising athletes who could never compete internationally because of apartheid. They understood each other then, but not anymore.

Daniels—whom everyone calls Wilfie—is the unofficial mayor of Stellenbosch, a leafy college town in the wine country. He likes to hold court at the Jan Cats restaurant, in front of the elegant Stellenbosch Hotel. As he sat at his street-front table on a sunny afternoon in a green Izod jacket and track pants, drinking a bottle of Chenin blanc, every other person who passed by stopped to pay his respects, or at least waved at him driving by. Daniels was a famous athlete in his youth, and he is even more famous now. In early September, he resigned from A.S.A. in protest over its handling of Caster Semenya, and had since been in the papers constantly. "We allowed it," he said. "If we as management were on our game, we would've objected. We accompanied her to the slaughter. And that is my dilemma."

Daniels was not directly involved in the testing or the coverup. During the first training session in Berlin, "while she was warming up and stretching, putting on her spikes, she told me they had done tests on her. I said, 'What tests?' " Semenya told him that she didn't know what they were for, but she described what had happened. "They put her feet in straps and 'they work down there,' she said. They told her it was dope tests." Semenya had undergone routine doping tests many times before. She knew that this was something very different.

"If you and me who come from the big cities, if we find it repulsive, I mean, what about a rural girl," Daniels said. "She doesn't know what's happening around her. She's seven, eight months in the city now, in Pretoria, a new life altogether, and nobody takes the time to explain to her?" He shook his head in disgust. "It was unprovoked talk, and she's not somebody who talks, normally. And she spoke to me as a Colored guy, as a man, about intimate, female things. That to me was like a cry for help."

The sins of A.S.A., as Daniels sees it, are, first, not giving Semenya adequate information about the Pretoria tests—including her right to refuse them—and, second, not pulling her out of the competition in Berlin.

"It's the day before the championships," Daniels said. "Eighteen years old, your first World Championships, the greatest race of your life. You can't focus, because you have to go for gender testing. And you come back and you have to watch on TV: they are explaining the possibilities. I found her in her room, sitting in front of the TV like this," Daniels put his hand up to his face to show how close she was to the screen. "And they're talking about her and she's trying to understand what they're saying. Because nobody has spoken to her, to tell her, Look, this is what these tests might mean. I felt so ashamed."

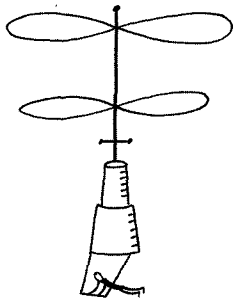
Daniels has worked in various capacities at A.S.A. over the years, first in management, then as a coach, and, most recently, as A.S.A.'s coördinator with the High Performance Centre, the program at the University of Pretoria where Semenya is now. Daniels does not agree with the I.A.A.F.'s assessment that Semenya's seven-and-a-half-second improvement was "supernatural." She went from training on the dirt roads of Limpopo to a world-class facility. She is also an extraordinarily hard worker. "Understand: Maria Mutola is her hero," Daniels said. "So she had wonderful goals and ideals for herself; she was really trying to emulate her hero one day." Maria Mutola is a runner from Mozambique whose event, like Semenya's, was the eight hundred metres. Mutola also happened to have a strikingly masculine appearance.

Daniels believes that the best that can happen for Semenya at this point is to have a career like his. He has travelled the world and met many of his heroes. He has a cellar with more than two thousand bottles of red wine. He eats his grilled springbok at Jan Cats and clearly enjoys being a local eminence. But it is probably not the life he would have led if apartheid hadn't prevented him from competing internationally; and it is not the life that was in front of Caster Semenya before she went to Germany. "I understand that her running days are over," Daniels said.

There's another scenario, in which Semenya's story could become one of against-all-odds victory. The I.A.A.F. could apologize and decree Semenya female. Kobus van der Walt, the director of sport at the High Performance Centre, pointed out that though Semenya has beaten the South African record for her event, she hasn't come anywhere near Kratochvílová's world record, which means that there are plenty of women with a chance of besting Semenya. Conceivably, one day we will see Caster Semenya at the Olympics with a medal hanging from her neck. She could be the poster child for triumphant transgression.

But that is not what Daniels thinks will happen. "Now her life is over," he said. "Not only as an athlete but as a human being. Even if the I.A.A.F. says there's nothing wrong with her, people will always look at her twice. There should be hell to pay for those responsible." He pounded his fist on the table. "I've got a daughter. If that was my daughter, what would I have done as a father? Somebody might have been dead by now."

On November 5th, Chuene and the entire board of A.S.A. were suspended by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee, pending an investigation into how they handled Caster Semenya.



One afternoon at the High Performance Centre, I sat up in the bleachers, killing time before a meeting with Kobus Van der Walt. I was surrounded by a spread of neatly partitioned fields, like a Brueghel painting: there are twenty-four cricket nets, six rugby fields, twenty-two outdoor tennis courts, nine soccer fields, seven squash courts, and a track surrounded by a three-thousand-seat stadium, all kept in impeccable condition. Runners in little packs zoomed around the fields and into the distance. Spring sunlight flicked along the blue of the swimming pool.

A figure in a black sweatshirt with the hood up walked along the path about thirty yards in front of me. There was something about this person's build and movements that drew my attention. I got up and followed along the path, until I caught up to the person where he or she was stopped behind the cafeteria, talking to a waiter and a cook, both of whom were much shorter than she was. It was Caster Semenya.

She wore sandals and track pants and kept her hood up. When she shook my hand, I noticed that she had long nails. She didn't look like an eighteen-year-old girl, or an eighteen-year-old boy. She looked like something else, something magnificent.

I told her I had come from New York City to write about her, and she asked me why.

"Because you're the champion," I said.

She snorted and said, "You make me laugh."

I asked her if she would talk to me, not about the tests or Chuene but about her evolution as an athlete, her progression from Limpopo to the world stage. She shook her head vigorously. "No," she said. "I can't talk to you. I can't talk to anyone. I can't say to anyone how I feel or what's in my mind."

I said I thought that must suck.

"No," she said, very firmly. Her voice was strong and low. "That doesn't suck. It sucks when I was running and they were writing those things. That sucked. That is when it sucks. Now I just have to walk away. That's all I can do." She smiled a small, bemused smile. "Walk away from all of this, maybe forever. Now I just walk away." Then she took a few steps backward, turned around, and did. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/OUTLOUD
Ariel Levy talks about Caster Semenya.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE POLITICS OF DEATH

From abortion to health care—how the hysterical style overtook the national debate.

BY JILL LEPORE

Just before eight o'clock on the morning of October 20, 1975, Thomas Trapasso left the rectory at Our Lady of the Lake, a stone church perched on a bluff in Mount Arlington, New Jersey. Through a lashing rain, he drove downhill to Lake Hopatcong and, after a mile or so, wended his way onto Ryerson Road, where he slowed down in front of a two-story bungalow. Forty reporters stood in the yard, huddled beneath trees. Mail reached this house even when it bore no more address than "To Karen Quinlan's Family, U.S.A."

Karen Ann Quinlan, twenty-one years old, was not at home. She was a dozen miles away, at St. Clare's, a Catholic hospital in Denville. Six months earlier, she had collapsed after taking Valium and drinking several gin-and-tonics during a night out with friends, and had stopped breathing. Before she was resuscitated, her brain had been without oxygen for two periods of about fifteen minutes each. She had never regained consciousness. Since falling into a coma, she had lost half her weight; she weighed less than seventy pounds. Her eyes opened and shut. She flailed, she grimaced: muscle spasms, and nothing more. Short of a miracle, there was no conceivable hope of recovery. A feeding tube and a respirator kept her alive. Her parents, Julia and Joseph Quinlan, talked with Trapasso, their parish priest, who was also Julia Quinlan's boss (she worked in the rectory, as his secretary), and, in July, they had asked her doctors to remove the respirator. Her doctors had refused.

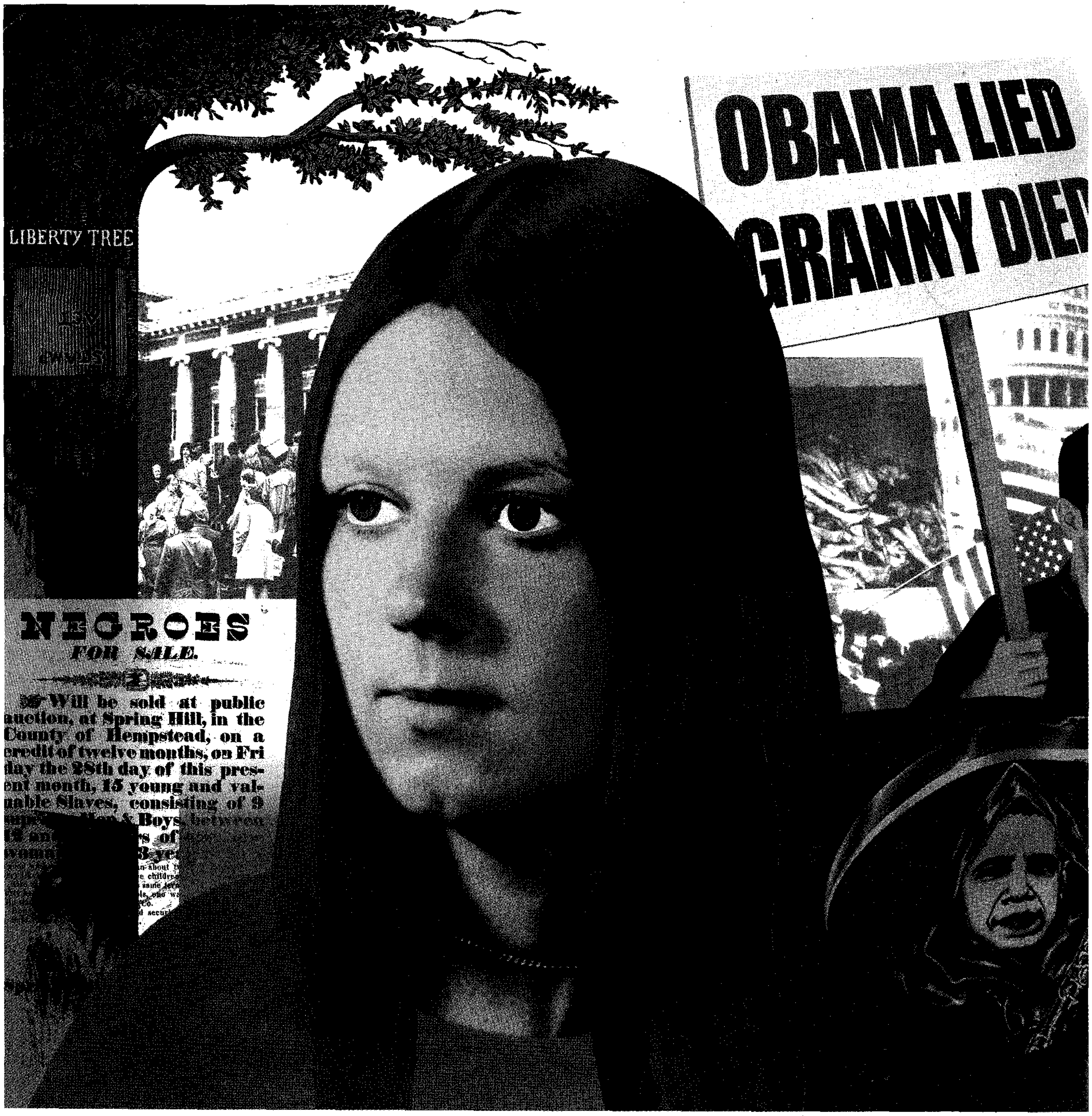
In front of the Quinlans' bungalow on Ryerson Road stood a statue of the Virgin Mary, eyes downcast, arms outspread, palms to the sky. As Trapasso pulled into the driveway, the reporters advanced. When the Quinlans opened a side door, the flashbulbs, Julia Quinlan later remembered, popped like fireworks. "God, see me through this," she prayed, just before she and her husband made a dash for the priest's car. They climbed in, and Trapasso pulled out of the drive.

This matter of life and death would not be decided in a stone church, perched on a bluff. It would not be decided in the Quinlans' bungalow, in the next town over. It wouldn't even be decided in a hospital room, where a respirator whirred as the rain pattered on the windowpane, sounds that Karen Ann Quinlan, who used to play the piano by ear, could no longer hear. Through that autumn storm, Trapasso drove, east, and south, to Morristown, the county seat. The Quinlans were going to court. When they reached Morristown, where George Washington once quartered his troops, Julia Quinlan thought the Morris County Courthouse looked like Tara, the mansion in "Gone with the Wind," and the army of reporters camped out front like Civil War soldiers, wet, weary, and bedraggled. Inside, a judge was preparing to hear arguments about a case called In the matter of Karen Quinlan. "Whatever the decision," a reporter for the Washington *Post* wrote, "it is one that will haunt us for years to come."

This past summer, Sarah Palin warned that the Obama Administration's health-care plan would lead to "death panels"; Senator Chuck Grassley, of Iowa, agreed that citizens had "every right to fear" that the government would issue orders about "pulling the plug on Grandma"; and street-theatre "death panelists" paraded on the Mall wearing masks inspired by Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream" and T-shirts picturing Barack Obama as the Grim Reaper. The Karen Quinlan case lies, largely forgotten, behind much of this year's health-care debate. More important, it marked a fundamental shift in American political history: in the decades since Quinlan, all manner of domestic-policy issues have been recast as matters of life and death—urgent, uncompromising, and absolute.

This shift began in 1968, when Pope Paul VI issued "Of Human Life," an encyclical affirming the sanctity of life from the moment of conception. In 1973, the Supreme Court's ruling in Roe v. Wade galvanized opposition to abortion. Two years later, the Quinlan case brought the end of life into the halls of government. Reasonable people on all sides agree that profoundly serious and difficult questions lie at the heart of these matters, which is why extremists within the pro-life movement have never managed to tar their opponents as "anti-life" or "pro-death." Nevertheless, in the wake of Roe and Quinlan a very small but by no means inconsequential number of people have come to believe that Congress, the President, the courts, and assorted unnamed bureaucrats are plotting to deny medical care to the very sick and the very old, to babies born with deformities, to the elderly and infirm, to the ailing and the poor, to the disabled and the insane; that doctors, acting on orders from Washington, will one day soon disconnect respirators, turn off incubators, yank out feeding tubes, unhook I.V.s, and refuse to renew lifesaving prescriptions; that the machinery of the world's most powerful nation is, even now, being turned to the remorseless and unceasing project of euthanizing the weakest members of society. Or something along those lines. The story changes fairly often. Sometimes it involves organ harvesting. Rarely does Hitler go unmentioned.

Most recently, this conspiracy theory hijacked health-care reform; the Administration proved unable to escape it. At first, asking ordinary Americans to consider changes in their health insurance served as an unwelcome reminder of a dreaded truth: death comes to us


LIBERTY TREE
NEGROES
FOR SALE.
Will be sold at public auction, at Spring Hill, in the County of Hempstead, on a credit of twelve months, on Friday the 28th day of this present month, 15 young and valuable Slaves, consisting of 9
OBAMA LIED
GRANNY DIED

Liberty, as a rallying cry, brought revolution; property issues triggered civil war. Now our post-Quinlan era has politicized life itself.

JOHN RITTER

all. Mortality would not appear to be a promising partisan trigger issue, but, after Palin invoked death panels and Grassley started talking about pulling the plug on Grandma, that fear turned to anger. On August 7th, Palin posted her thoughts on her Facebook page: "The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's 'death panel' so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their 'level of productivity in society,' whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil." The story spread so fast that, four days later, at a town-hall meeting in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, President Obama felt compelled to address it. "The rumor that's been circulating a lot lately is this idea that somehow the House of Representatives voted for 'death panels' that will basically pull the plug on Grandma," he said, adding—because things had got so bad that this actually required saying—"I am not in favor of that."

Rallying a party base against death makes for a creepy sort of populism. But if harnessing the fear of death for political gain is a grotesque tactic, it may also be a savvy one. When death is on the table, to be left declaring "I am not in favor of it" is to be catastrophically outmaneuvered.

One day soon—after funding for abortion is resolved—health-care reform will likely pass into the pages of the *Federal Register*, but it's just one battle in what the people fighting this fight hardest like to call a war for the soul of America. Protesters wave poster-size pictures of Terri Schiavo, fetuses, umbilical cords, and electrical outlets. Riders banning abortion, con-

"Can't you just see us sitting here every morning with our coffee, gazing out the window and worrying about how to pay the mortgage?"

• •

traception, and sex education tie up bills in committee, bills that, usually, have nothing to do with abortion or contraception or sex education. Judicial nominees have faced "litmus tests" over abortion, and scrutiny over embryo storage, genetic testing, stem-cell research, and palliative care. Whatever happens to health care, the fear that our government is conspiring to hold over us the power of life and death will linger, and take another form, because, however wildly and dangerously preposterous, it's a feature of a newly configured political landscape, where, since the nineteen-seventies, what we're talking about, even when we seem to be talking about something else, is a disputed right to life. Except that, most of the time, we're not talking. We're screaming.

Before Thomas Jefferson stumbled upon the felicitous phrase "the pursuit of happiness," life, liberty, and property constituted the Enlightenment's list of natural rights. "The inhabitants of the English colonies in North-America," the Continental Congress declared in 1774, "are entitled to life, liberty and property." In 1780, when John Adams drafted the Massachusetts constitution, he rambled on about the people's "right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness." But, in three words or a hundred and three, life, liberty, and property are the rights that Americans talk about, and fight over. We have screamed at one another before. Taking a long view of American history, it's possible to argue that each of these rights has led to a fracture in the body politic, a dispute in which there seemed to be no room for compromise. Urgency, suffering, paranoia, partisanship, violence, political theatre, insurrection, and a swirl of disputed ideas have gathered around each of these contested rights. But, from one era to the next, the ideas have been different.

In the eighteenth century, colonists on both sides of the struggle for independence worried that their rulers were plotting against their liberties. Americans danced under liberty poles; they sang liberty songs; they wore liberty caps. A conspiracy appeared to be afoot. "A series of occurrences," the people of Boston resolved, "afford great reason to believe that a deep-laid and desperate plan of imperial despotism has been laid, and partly executed, for the extinction of all civil liberty." In 1774, Thomas Jefferson concluded that "single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day; but a series of oppressions . . . too plainly prove a deliberate and systematical plan." The Declaration of Independence is Jefferson's list of those acts of tyranny. Liberty, like all natural rights, is so capacious and debatable an idea that it can be made to stretch across both sides of almost any conflict. When the war began, as many as one in three colonists remained loyal to the Crown, insisting that they, not the so-called patriots, were the "*true* lovers of liberty."

In the nineteenth century, Americans worried about a conspiracy against property—a property interest in people. In 1820, the Missouri Compromise, which prohibited "this species of property" north of the thirty-sixth parallel, divided the country in half. Jefferson called it a national "act of suicide." Four years after the Compromise of 1850 redrew the line between slave and free states, Abraham Lincoln wrote that the framers had forborne "to so much as mention the word 'slave' or 'slavery,'" which left the disease festering in the body politic: "Thus, the thing is hid away, in the constitution, just as an afflicted man hides away a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death." In 1857, in Dred Scott v. Sandford, the Supreme Court ruled that the framers had intended to define "the negro race" not as people but as property, to be "bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise." Slave owners feared an abolitionist conspiracy, "a party in the North organized for the express purpose of robbing the citizens of the Southern States of their property." In 1859, John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry realized those fears. On the floor of the Senate, Jefferson Davis made a threat: "If we are not to be protected in our property and sovereignty, we . . . will dissever the ties that bind us together, even if it rushes us into a sea of blood." The following year, South Carolina became the first state to secede, citing as its reason the federal government's failure to honor its "right of property in slaves." The contested right to property led to the Civil War, and six hundred thousand dead.

We still talk about liberty and property, of course, and, for much of American history, rights talk has been about equality. But in the past half century Americans have been fighting over the right to life. There are only so many cards in this political deck, and life, it would seem, trumps all.

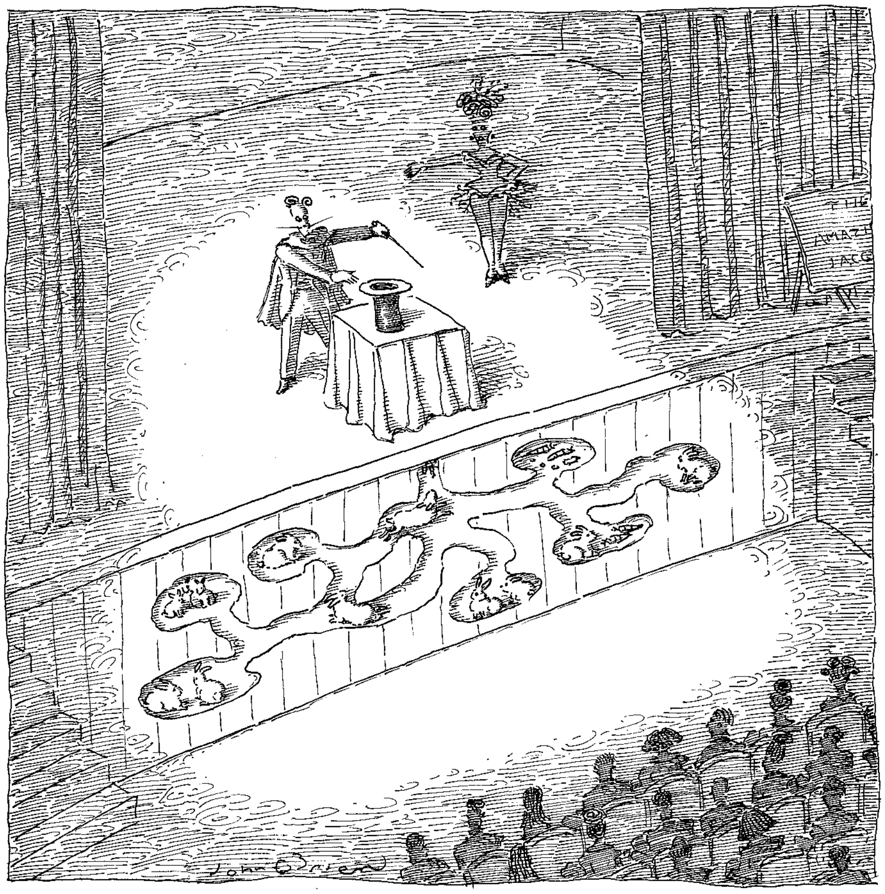
No more than a few dozen spectators managed to get into the courthouse on the day that the Karen Ann Quinlan trial began. They had waited for hours. Among them was Prophet Dan, a man with a white beard, who believed he could cure the patient. (Faith healers had also been turning up at St. Clare's, asking to lay hands on Quinlan, to the consternation of the nuns who ran the hospital, the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.) Just before nine o'clock, Julia and Joseph Quinlan and Thomas Trapasso made their way to the courtroom on the second floor, and settled in a cushioned mahogany bench, as straight as any pew. It looked as if they had entered a chapel, as if the tall arched windows were made of stained glass. That, however, was only a trick of the eye: wet autumn leaves, glinting through clear panes as the sun broke through the clouds.

"The curtain rises on one of the most compelling dramas since the Scopes trial sought to establish the roots of human life," one newsman wrote, filing a report for the New York *Daily News*. Of the hundred and thirty-seven seats in the courtroom, a hundred were taken by reporters. (That fall, the Quinlans received more than a thousand pieces of mail: letters, jars of holy water, and boxes of rosaries.) No cameras were allowed. A reporter later offered the Quinlans a hundred thousand dollars for a photograph of their daughter in her hospital bed, but they refused, which is why the iconic image of Karen Ann Quinlan is her high-school yearbook picture, a head shot of a pale and unsmiling eighteen-year-old with long dark hair.

This story had everything: a pretty girl ("Sleeping Beauty," the press called her); a handsome young lawyer (the Quinlans' thirty-year-old attorney, Paul Armstrong, looked as if he'd come straight out of the 1973 film "The Paper Chase"); and just the sort of edge-of-your-seat, high-stakes medical drama that television viewers tuned in for in prime time, especially "Emergency!," NBC's popular series about L.A. paramedics, which ran from 1972 to 1977. Reporters had started covering the story in September, when Armstrong filed papers asking the court to appoint Joseph Quinlan as his daughter's guardian. "These poor people really need help," Armstrong told a colleague. "The whole world needs help. It's man against technology."

Since 1975, more than a quarter of all Medicare money has gone toward paying for services provided in the final year of life. Those services typically involve machines plugged into electrical outlets: EKGs, feeding tubes, defibrillators, and respirators. It is hard to remember how new all this was in 1975. Intensive-care units date basically to the nineteen-fifties. It wasn't until that decade that the majority of American deaths began to take place in hospitals or other medical institutions. When death moved away from home, doctors, hospitals, and insurance companies took charge of the end of life. By the nineteen-sixties, seventy-five per cent of the dying spent at least eighty days in a hospital or a nursing home during the last year of life. For decades now, life expectancy has been rising. But the longer we live the longer we die.

In 1965, Charles Mayo, of the Mayo Clinic, insisted that "people have as much the right to die as the right to live." Machines made to save and extend lives might end up inflicting a sort of torture, some feared. More and more patients and their families struggled with doctors and hospitals and health-insurance companies. In 1972, the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging held hearings on "Death with Dignity," and, two years later, ABC aired a documentary called "The Right to Die." Opinions on these questions had not yet entirely hardened along either partisan or denominational lines. The Quinlans and their priest had been guided by "The Prolongation of Life," a statement issued by Pope Pius XII in 1957; it obligated Catholics to use only



ordinary means, rather than extraordinary means, to extend life. In 1975, the respirator that kept Karen Ann Quinlan alive seemed, to her parents, altogether extraordinary. Their daughter's doctors did not agree. Nor would the court grant this argument. "I thought I'd just go to the clerk and talk to the judge and it would be settled," Joseph Quinlan said. But, on September 15th, Judge Robert Muir, Jr., a forty-three-year-old Presbyterian, refused to name Quinlan as his daughter's guardian, and instead appointed to that position a part-time public defender named Daniel Coburn. It was on the basis of Muir's refusal that the case had come to trial.

There had been some question, in pre-trial proceedings, whether Karen Ann Quinlan was still among the living. The press wondered, too. "Is Karen Ann Quinlan alive or dead?" *Time* asked. Armstrong might have thought to establish "brain death," a state described in a report issued in 1968 by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death, a committee that had consisted of ten doctors, a lawyer, a theologian, and a historian. "Under the existing legal and medical definitions of death recognized by the State of New Jersey," Armstrong had insisted, "Karen Ann Quinlan is dead."

Brain death—the cessation of brain function, as measured, in part, by two flat electroencephalograms, or EEGs, during a period of twenty-four hours—was a legal definition intended to allow surgeons to remove organs for transplant from patients whose hearts could be kept beating artificially without fear of being charged with homicide or wrongful death. The first heart transplant was conducted in 1967; in 1968, doctors transplanted more than a hundred hearts. Brain death, which is something between a medical fiction and a legal one, was meant to facilitate organ transplant; it had little to do with the kind of decision the Quinlans faced.

In 1975, only eight states had adopted laws defining "brain death." New Jersey was not among them. By the time the trial began, Armstrong had conceded that Quinlan was not dead. She did not meet the criterion for brain death. Her EEG was not flat. In fact, the chief reason she was still alive, six months after collapsing, was that such a criterion existed. Before that 1968 committee set out formal guidelines, and before the rise of malpractice suits (which dates to the nineteen-sixties), patients in what is termed a "persistent vegetative state" had been allowed to die. What was new wasn't pulling the plug or not pulling the plug. What was new was the plug.

"Hold on a minute, will you? I just want to see what color Charlie Rose's tie is tonight."

There were nine lawyers in the courtroom on that October morning. Most of them looked barely more than thirty, Julia Quinlan recalled in a memoir: "So young, to be arguing about death." In his brief, Armstrong, citing Griswold v. Connecticut and Roe v. Wade, held that the right to die fell under the right to privacy. In the courtroom, he opened by making an argument about the afterlife. The Quinlans, he said, "believe that the earthly phase of Karen's life has drawn to a close, that the time of life striving is over, and that further treatments merely hold her back from the realization and enjoyment of a better, more perfect life." Calling on the language of the nascent right-to-die movement, Armstrong used the word "dignity" over and over. "The answer to the tragedy of Karen Ann Quinlan," he told the court, "is to be found in the love, faith, and courage of her family, who ask only that she be allowed to return to God with grace and dignity."

Coburn considered it his job to protect Quinlan's "constitutional right to life," a phrase that echoed the central tenet of the pro-life movement. He spoke next. A chancery court, he insisted, ought not to be asked to entertain arguments about an afterlife. "This is not a Court of love," Coburn said. "This is a Court of law." The Attorney General of New Jersey, William Hyland, then spoke. "It is not for the executive or the judicial branches of government," he argued, "to evaluate the quality and usefulness of life and, based upon that assessment, to determine that a citizen's life is not worth preserving." Hyland didn't want the court to make any sort of decision. Doctors knew best.

Ralph Porzio, an attorney retained by the doctors who had refused to pull the plug, told the court that "sanctity of life" was the "cornerstone of our Western culture." (That may be, but the phrase "sanctity of life" never entered the *Congressional Record* before 1920; only in 1970 did it begin to appear with any frequency; and it wasn't mentioned in a U.S. Supreme Court decision until 1972, with the death-penalty case Furman v. Georgia.) He then proceeded to imply that the sanctity of life and the right to life were one and the same, reminding the court that, of the rights listed in the Declaration of Independence—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—"the first is life." And he observed that the same was true of life, liberty, and property, the rights protected by the Fourteenth Amendment: "The first is life."

Karen Ann Quinlan wasn't dead. But, terrifyingly, she wasn't fully alive, either. Maybe she was no longer human: the parts of her brain that made her so had been lost. Her sister, her mother, and one of her friends testified that she had always said she'd rather be dead than kept alive like this. Nearly all of the remaining witnesses called to testify were doctors, asked to offer a prognosis. A chart of the human brain, three feet high by five feet wide, was introduced as evidence, and displayed in front of Judge Muir's bench. Much of the trial transcript reads like lecture notes from a neurobiology class. Lawyers and reporters alike attempted to describe Quinlan's condition in plain English. Groping for words, many settled on one: "fetal." A neurologist told the court that Quinlan's twisted and emaciated body was "too grotesque, really, to describe in human terms like fetal," but, with that exception, she was almost invariably described in just that way. She was curled up like a fetus in the womb, the respirator her umbilical cord. She was twenty-one and no longer a child, but no one ever talked about Quinlan as if she were an adult, or ever had been. She was a girl. She was Karen Ann. (One of her doctors told the court that his own daughter was also named Karen Ann, which couldn't help but affect him.) And the legal question to be settled, after all, concerned guardianship: Who would take care of this girl? She wasn't somebody's wife and she was no one's mother; she was somebody's daughter, and her parents wanted to end her life. In some meaningful way, Karen Ann Quinlan seemed akin to a baby. Another neurologist compared her brain waves to those of an infant (to point out that they didn't measure up). An attorney asked another medical expert to estimate Quinlan's mental age: Was she like "a two-week-old infant, five-week-old infant, seven-year-old child, or something like that?" The doctor balked at the question's premise—it was a clumsy and ill-considered analogy—but, when pressed, he reluctantly offered this gruesome reply: "The best way I can describe this would be to take the situation of an anencephalic monster. An anencephalic monster is an infant that's born with no cerebral hemisphere. . . . If you take a child like this, in the dark, and you put a flashlight in back of the head, the light comes out of the pupils. They have no brain. O.K.?"

Babies born without brains had lately been in the news. In October, 1973, nine months after the Supreme Court handed down its decision in Roe v. Wade, two pediatricians, Raymond Duff and Alexander Campbell, reported in *The New England Journal of Medicine* that anencephalic and other severely deformed or premature infants were being allowed to die in one of the country's most prestigious hospitals. Between 1970 and 1972, Duff and Campbell found, forty-three of two hundred and ninety-nine deaths in the special-care nursery at Yale-New Haven Hospital were the result of withholding or withdrawing treatment. Even with heroic measures, these babies were not likely to survive beyond a few hours or days. However agonizing the decision to let them die, Duff and Campbell stood by it.

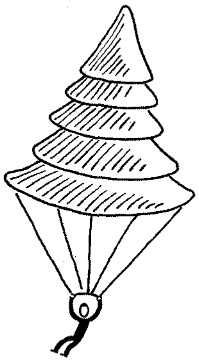
That report, along with other highly publicized cases, fuelled the growing pro-life movement. NBC News reported that fifty-eight per cent of Americans, including forty-six per cent of Catholics, approved of legalizing abortion in the first trimester. After Roe v. Wade, newly founded organizations like the National Right to Life Committee concentrated their efforts on putting a stop to late-term abortions. The month that Duff and Campbell's study was published, Kenneth Edelin, an obstetrician at Boston City Hospital, performed an abortion on a seventeen-year-old girl whose pregnancy may have been as advanced as twenty-four weeks. In April of 1974, Edelin was indicted for manslaughter, largely through the efforts of a group called Massachusetts Citizens for Life. The state argued that he had delivered a live male infant, and killed him. In February of 1975, seven months before Karen Ann Quinlan's case went to court, Edelin was found guilty. (The conviction was overturned in 1976.)

In the wake of Roe v. Wade, Duff and Campbell's report, and Edelin's conviction, Quinlan's fate rested as much on ideas about abortion as on those about euthanasia. Historians have called In the matter of Karen Quinlan the most significant medical case in American history. Unlike any trial before or since, it brought the right to life and the right to die together, in a sort of mortal combat. To the press, it was too important a story not to report; it was a very easy story to exploit. It was high; it was low. It was tabloid; it was Plato. There was only one problem: it lacked a villain.

If Muir were to grant the Quinlans' petition, Ralph Porzio warned the court, it would be "like turning on the gas chamber." Enter the villain. Against the sanctity of life, against the first right listed in the Declaration of Independence, Porzio pitted Hitler: "Fresh in our minds are the Nazi atrocities. . . . Fresh in our minds are the Nuremberg Code."

At the end of the Second World War, thirteen trials were held in the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg, Germany. Opening arguments in the medical trial, known as the Doctors' Trial but formally designated U.S.A. v. Karl Brandt et al., began on December 9, 1946, two days before the United Nations declared genocide a crime. (The word "genocide" had been coined in 1943.) Of the twenty-three defendants charged with war crimes, twenty were university-trained German physicians and scientists. The charges against them included operating a state-run euthanasia program, killing hundreds of thousands of the elderly and the insane, the “feeble-minded” and the lame, crippled children and deformed babies; and conducting experiments on human subjects, maiming, torturing, and murdering thousands of Jews, Poles, and Russians, mostly in concentration camps. “A few of the survivors will appear in this courtroom,” the chief prosecutor said, in his opening statement. “But most of these miserable victims were slaughtered outright or died in the course of the tortures to which they were subjected.” After eight months, seven of the defendants were acquitted and sixteen were convicted.

The trial’s verdict included a statement on ethical standards for medical research, the Nuremberg Code. As important as the Nuremberg Code later became in the United States—it lay behind the founding, in the nineteen-sixties, of the field known as bioethics—the trials were virtually ignored in the nineteen-forties. As the historian of medicine David Rothman has pointed out, the American press hardly mentioned the Nuremberg trials in 1946 and 1947, and largely ignored the execution of seven of its convicted defendants in 1948. To the extent that Americans drew a lesson from Nuremberg, Rothman argues, it was that the government should not have a hand in medicine. “And here,” Rothman writes, “the distinction between the Nazi government and all other governments was lost.”



The spectre of Nazi medicine didn’t begin to haunt the United States until the nineteen-sixties. In 1961, Adolf Eichmann was put on trial for crimes against humanity, among other charges; he was hanged in 1962. In 1963, *The New Yorker* published Hannah Arendt’s “Eichmann in Jerusalem,” her report on the trial. It cast considerable attention on Nuremberg: Robert Servatius, Eichmann’s attorney, had also defended Karl Brandt in the Doctors’ Trial. Servatius’s defense of Eichmann was more or less the same as his defense of Brandt: these men, implicated in the torture and murder of millions of people, were simply doing their jobs. Eichmann was an ordinary civil servant; Brandt, a surgeon who attended Hitler, an ordinary doctor. Arendt told of one exchange between Servatius and the court. Eichmann, Servatius insisted, was innocent of charges regarding “the collection of skeletons, sterilizations, killings by gas, and *similar medical matters*.” The judge interrupted him: “Dr. Servatius, I assume you made a slip of the tongue when you said that killing by gas was a medical matter.” Servatius: “It was indeed a medical matter, since it was prepared by physicians; it *was a matter of killing, and killing, too, is a medical matter*.” (The italics are Arendt’s.)

One reason that Nazi medical atrocities, long ignored by the American press, captured the nation’s attention in the nineteen-sixties was that Americans were, at just that moment, obsessed with death and doctors. When death moved to the hospital, it got scarier: so many machines, so many strangers, instruments that poke and prod, bright lights, sleepless nights. The more successfully medicine has staved off death, the less well anyone, including and maybe especially doctors and scientists, have accepted dying. (Or, for that matter, growing old. “Do you know, people used to not understand that aging is a disease?” a molecular biologist recently informed me, incredulous that anyone could ever have doubted—or might yet doubt—this premise.) The year *The New Yorker* ran “Eichmann in Jerusalem,” Jessica Mitford published “The American Way of Death.” More than twelve hundred books about death and bereavement were published between 1935 and 1968; twelve hundred more were published between 1968 and 1972 alone, as the scholar Peter Filene has observed in his excellent history of the right-to-die movement, “In the Arms of Others.” In 1974, *Publishers Weekly* announced, “Death is now selling books.”

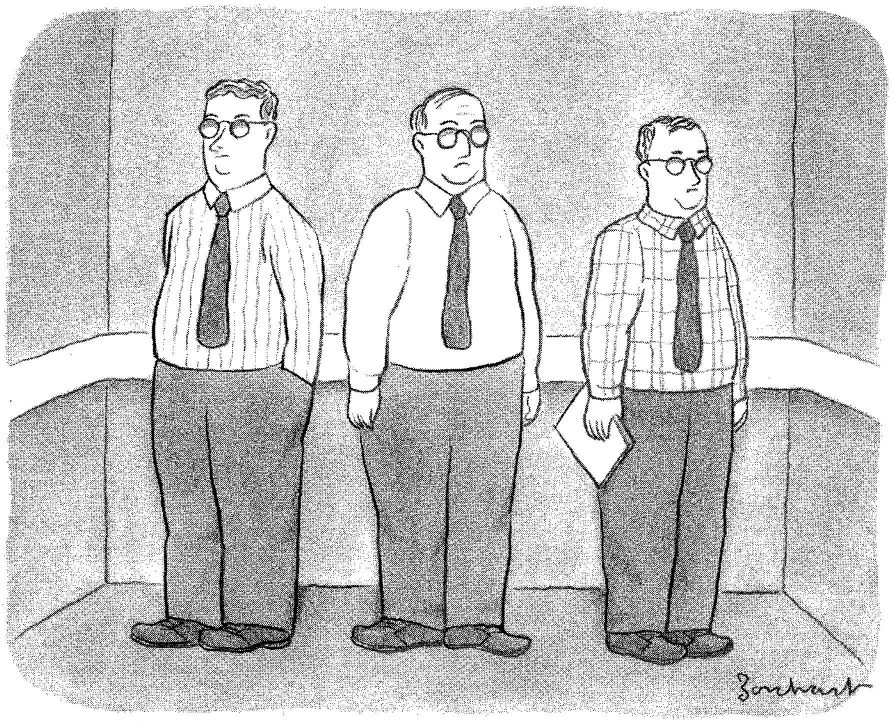
It didn’t matter that Nuremberg was about Nazi Germany. Evil is banal; it could happen here. “If the medical profession in Nazi Germany had shown more independence—if they had refused to partake in human experimentations,” Porzio told the court, “perhaps the Holocaust would not have been so great in terms of human lives and deformities.” That, Porzio suggested, is why the doctors he represented were unwilling to pull the plug. They had refused to allow a severely brain-damaged and comatose woman with no hope of recovery to die . . . because they were not Eichmann.

The trial adjourned on October 27, 1975. Muir promised to issue his ruling in two weeks.

At seven o’clock on the morning of November 10, 1975, Father Thomas Trapasso held Mass at Our Lady of the Lake. Joseph and Julia Quinlan had breakfast at their house on Ryerson Road, where a copy of Leonardo da Vinci’s “Last Supper” hung on the wall above the dining-room table. Then Joseph Quinlan drove to St. Clare’s, to visit his daughter, as he had done every day since she collapsed, seven months earlier. He had lunch at the rectory with his wife and their priest, surrounded by reporters. “It’s like eating in a storefront window,” Trapasso told a reporter. After lunch, they got into Trapasso’s car and drove to the Morris County Courthouse.

Television stations interrupted their programming to announce the decision: Muir had denied Joseph Quinlan’s request. This is “a medical decision, not a judicial one,” Muir wrote. In this case, “there is no constitutional right to die.”

The Quinlans appealed to the New Jersey Supreme Court, which heard the case in Trenton, on January 26, 1976. On March 31st, the justices issued a unanimous opinion, reversing the lower court. It held that, despite Quinlan’s “incompetence,” her right to refuse medical treatment fell under the Constitution’s protection of liberty, and that her father could exercise that right on her behalf. Agreeing with Armstrong, the court also grounded its ruling in the right to privacy. Finally, it identified a role for the moral sense of the community: if there is “no reasonable possibility of Karen’s ever emerging from her present comatose condition to a cognitive, sapient state, the



Elvis imitators from that universe where Elvis was dull, had an M.B.A., and couldn't sing.

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present life-support system may be withdrawn." Whether there was or wasn't a reasonable possibility of this sort of recovery would be decided in consultation with "the hospital 'Ethics Committee' or like body of the institution." These ethics committees are now better known as death panels.

The Quinlans had won, but, as Armstrong said at the press conference, you couldn't really call being granted permission to watch your daughter die more quickly a victory. Meanwhile, the California legislature had been debating a Natural Death Act: "Every person has the right to die without prolongation of life by medical means." The National Right to Life Committee lobbied against it. During a committee hearing, one person who testified placed on the witness table a copy of "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich." When the bill passed that June, its sponsor said, "Karen Quinlan haunts our dreams."

Karen Ann Quinlan did not die in 1976. Instead of pulling the plug, her doctors slowly weaned her off the respirator. To everyone's surprise, she was able to breathe on her own. In June of that year, she was moved to the Morris View Nursing Home. No one knew how long she might live. Her parents did not ask to have her feeding tube removed. Every time she got sick, reporters kept a deathwatch. One tried to get into the nursing home, disguised as a nun. Every day, her father stopped at the nursing home on his way to work, and again on his way home. Her mother visited daily, too. Once a week, she brought her parents. Quinlan's grandmother always whispered, "Hurry up and get better, Karen."

She lived through the Reagan revolution of 1980, when evangelicals joined the pro-life movement and brought the movement's style, tactics, and assumptions, if not always its agenda, into nearly all of American politics. She lived through the "Infant Doe" case two years later, when the parents of a baby born with Down syndrome refused to authorize lifesaving surgery for an easily fixed esophageal impairment. The baby starved to death. On the floor of Congress, Mick Staton, a Republican congressman from West Virginia, said the doctors' decision to let the parents refuse surgery had "terrifying similarities to the Nazi Reich's brand of eugenics." In the Washington *Post*, George Will wrote of his own son:

> Jonathan Will, 10, fourth-grader and Orioles fan (and the best wiffle-ball hitter in southern Maryland), has Down's syndrome. He does not 'suffer from' (as newspapers are wont to say) Down's syndrome. He suffers from nothing except anxiety about the Orioles' lousy start.

Matters of life and death are not, inherently, partisan. They have become so. Lately, heated partisanship has occasioned much hand-wringing. But the anxiety, commonly voiced by moderates, about the coming political apocalypse—surely someone will attempt an assassination, surely the two-party system is doomed, surely the American people have never before been so bitterly divided—is characterized by the same made-for-TV cliff-hanger intensity as the thumping zealotry that moderates worry about. (Will the nation endure? Tune in tomorrow! Or, no, wait, tune in ten minutes from now: I'll update my blog!) That's because life is often what we're talking about, even when we seem to be talking about something else, and, maybe even more important, do-or-die is how we're talking. We have always fought about rights, but life is different from liberty and property. When politics turns on a right shrouded in the sacred, issues demanding debate become matters inviolable, and political conversation is no longer civil, pluralist, and yielding. And when this happens, day after day, year after year, there is no more politics; there is only one sort of impasse or another.

Karen Ann Quinlan died, of pneumonia, on June 11, 1985. Her mother was with her, holding her daughter's hands, as bony as a bird's claws. Julia Quinlan prayed to the Virgin Mary, "To you I come; before you I stand." Her daughter took her last breath. The Quinlan family notified the press, and asked only to be left alone. Thomas Trapasso, now a monsignor, celebrated the Mass of Resurrection at Our Lady of the Lake. And then Karen Ann Quinlan's body was taken in a hearse, over miles of winding New Jersey roads, to a cemetery called Gate of Heaven. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/ASK

Jill Lepore chats live with readers.

FICTION

MIDNIGHT IN DOSTOEVSKY

BY DON DeLILLO

We were two sombre boys hunched in our coats, grim winter settling in. The college was at the edge of a small town way upstate, barely a town, maybe a hamlet, we said, or just a whistle stop, and we took walks all the time, getting out, going nowhere, low skies and bare trees, hardly a soul to be seen. This was how we spoke of the local people: they were souls, they were transient spirits, a face in the window of a passing car, runny with reflected light, or a long street with a shovel jutting from a snowbank, no one in sight.

We were walking parallel to the tracks when an old freight train approached and we stopped and watched. It seemed the kind of history that passes mostly unobserved, a diesel engine and a hundred boxcars rolling over remote country, and we shared an unspoken moment of respect, Todd and I, for times past, frontiers gone, and then walked on, talking about nothing much but making something of it. We heard the whistle sound as the train disappeared into late afternoon.

This was the day we saw the man in the hooded coat. We argued about the coat—loden coat, anorak, parka. It was our routine; we were ever ready to find a matter to contest. This was why the man had been born, to end up in this town wearing that coat. He was well ahead of us and walking slowly, hands clasped behind his back, a smallish figure turning now to enter a residential street and fade from view.

"A loden coat doesn't have a hood. A hood isn't part of the context," Todd said. "It's a parka or an anorak."

"There's others. There's always others."

"Name one."

"Duffel coat."

"There's duffel bag."

"There's duffel coat."

"Does the word imply a hood?"

"The word implies toggles."

"The coat had a hood. We don't know if the coat had toggles."

"Doesn't matter," I said. "Because the guy was wearing a parka."

" 'Anorak' is an Inuit word."

"So what."

"I say it's an anorak," he said.

I tried to invent an etymology for the word "parka" but couldn't think fast enough. Todd was on another subject—the freight train, laws of motion, effects of force, sneaking in a question about the number of boxcars that trailed the locomotive. We hadn't stated in advance that a tally would be taken, but each of us had known that the other would be counting, even as we spoke about other things. When I told him now what my number was, he did not respond, and I knew what this meant. It meant that he'd arrived at the same number. This was not supposed to happen—it unsettled us, it made the world flat—and we walked for a time in chagrined silence. Even in matters of pure physical reality, we depended on a friction between our basic faculties of sensation, his and mine, and we understood now that the rest of the afternoon would be spent in the marking of differences.

We headed back for a late class.

"An anorak is substantial. The thing he was wearing looked pretty flimsy," I said. "And an anorak would have a fur-lined hood. Consider the origin of the word. You're the one who brought up the Inuits. Wouldn't an Inuit use fur to line his hood? They have polar bear. They have walrus. They need coats with bulk and substance top to bottom."

"We saw the guy from behind," he said. "How do you know what kind of hood it was? From behind and from a distance."

Consider the origin of the word. I was using his Inuit lore against him, forcing him to respond reasonably, a rare sign of weakness on his part. Todd was a determined thinker who liked to work a fact or an idea to the seventh level of interpretation. He was tall and sprawling, all bony framework, the kind of body not always in synch with its hinges and joints. Somebody said that he seemed the love child of storks, others thought ostriches. He did not seem to taste food; he consumed it, absorbed it, ingestible matter of plant or animal origin. He spoke of distances in metres and kilometres, and it took me a while to understand that this was not an affectation so much as a driving need to convert units of measurement more or less instantaneously. He liked to test himself on what he knew. He liked to stop walking to emphasize a point as I walked on. This was my counterpoint, to let him stand there talking to a tree. The shallower our arguments, the more intense we became.

I wanted to keep this one going, to stay in control, to press him hard. Did it matter what I said?

"Even from a distance the hood looked too small to be fur-lined. The hood was snug," I said. "A true anorak would have a hood that's roomy enough to fit a woollen cap underneath. Isn't that what the Inuits do?"

The campus appeared in fragments, through ranks of tall trees on the other side of a country road. We lived in a series of energy-efficient structures with solar panels, turfed rooftops, and red cedar walls. Classes were held in the original buildings, several massive concrete units known collectively as the Cellblock, a bike ride or long walk away from the dorms, and the flow of students back and forth in tribal swarms seemed part of the architecture of the place. This was my first year here, and I was still trying to interpret the signs and adapt to the patterns.

"They have caribou," I said. "They have seal meat and ice floes."

At times, abandon meaning to impulse. Let the words be the facts. This was the nature of our walks—to register what was out there, all the scattered rhythms of circumstance and occurrence, and to reconstruct it as human noise.

The class was Logic, in Cellblock 2, thirteen of us seated along both sides of a long table, with Ilgauskas at the head, a stocky man, late forties, beset this day by periodic coughing. He spoke from a standing position, bent forward, hands set on the table, and often stared for long moments into the blank wall at the other end of the room.

"The causal nexus," he said, and stared into the wall.

He stared; we glanced. We exchanged glances frequently, one side of the table with the other. We were fascinated by Ilgauskas. He seemed a man in a trance state. But he wasn't simply absent from his remarks, another drained voice echoing down the tunnel of teaching years. We'd decided, some of us, that he was suffering from a neurological condition. He was not bored but simply unbound, speaking freely and erratically out of a kind of stricken insight. It was a question of neurochemistry. We'd decided that the condition was not understood well enough to have been given a name. And if it did not have a name, we said, paraphrasing a proposition in logic, then it could not be treated.

"The atomic fact," he said.

Then he elaborated for ten minutes

JEAN-FRANÇOIS MARTIN

while we listened, glanced, made notes, riffled the textbook to find refuge in print, some semblance of meaning that might be roughly equivalent to what he was saying. There were no laptops or handheld devices in class. Ilgauskas didn't exclude them; we did, sort of, unspokenly. Some of us could barely complete a thought without touch pads or scroll buttons, but we understood that high-speed data systems did not belong here. They were an assault on the environment, which was defined by length, width, and depth, with time drawn out, computed in heartbeats. We sat and listened or sat and waited. We wrote with pens or pencils. Our notebooks had pages made of flexible sheets of paper.

I tried to exchange glances with the girl across the table. This was the first time we'd been seated face to face, but she kept looking down at her notes, her hands, maybe the grain of the wood along the edge of the table. I told myself that she was averting her eyes not from me but from Ilgauskas.

"*F* and not-*F*," he said.

He made her shy, the blunt impact of the man, thick body, strong voice, staccato cough, even the old dark suit he wore, unpressed, to every class, his chest hair curling up out of the open shirt collar. He used German and Latin terms without defining them. I tried to insert myself into the girl's line of sight, scrunching down and peering up. We listened earnestly, all of us, hoping to understand and to transcend the need to understand.

Sometimes he coughed into his cupped hand, other times into the table, and we imagined microscopic life forms teeming toward the tabletop and ricocheting into breathable space. Those seated nearest him ducked away with a wince that was also a smile, half apologetic. The shy girl's shoulders quivered, even though she was sitting at some distance from the man. We didn't expect Ilgauskas to excuse himself. He was Ilgauskas. We were the ones at fault, for being there to witness the coughing, or for not being adequate to the seismic scale of it, or for other reasons not yet known to us.

"Can we ask this question?" he said.

We waited for the question. We wondered whether the question he'd asked was the question we were waiting for him to ask. In other words, could he ask the question he was asking? It was not a trick, not a game or a logical puzzle. Ilgauskas didn't do that. We sat and waited. He stared into the wall at the far end of the room.

It felt good to be out in the weather, that wintry sting of approaching snow. I was walking down a street of older houses, some in serious need of repair, sad and handsome, bay window here, curved porch there, when he turned the corner and came toward me, slightly crouched, same coat, face nearly lost inside the hood. He was walking slowly, as before, hands behind his back, as before, and he seemed to pause when he saw me, almost imperceptibly, head lowered now, path not quite steady.

There was no one else on the street. As we approached each other, he veered away, and then so did I, just slightly, to reassure him, but I also sent a stealthy look his way. The face inside the hood was stubbled—gray old man, I thought, large nose, eyes on the sidewalk but also noting my presence. After we'd passed each other, I waited a moment and then turned and looked. He wasn't wearing gloves, and this seemed fitting, I'm not sure why, no gloves, despite the unrelenting cold.

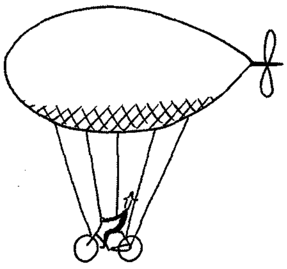
About an hour later, I was part of the mass movement of students going in opposite directions, in wind-whipped snow, two roughly parallel columns moving from old campus to new and vice versa, faces in ski masks, bodies shouldering into the wind or pushed along by it. I saw Todd, long-striding, and pointed. This was our standard sign of greeting or approval—we pointed. I shouted into the weather as he went by.

"Saw him again. Same coat, same hood, different street."

He nodded and pointed back, and two days later we were walking in the outlying parts of town. I gestured toward a pair of large trees, bare branches forking up fifty or sixty feet.

"Norway maple," I said.

He said nothing. They meant nothing to him, trees, birds, baseball teams. He knew music, classical to serial, and the history of mathematics, and a hundred other things. I knew trees from summer camp, when I was twelve, and I was pretty sure the trees were maples. Norway was another matter. I could have said red maple or sugar maple, but Norway sounded stronger, more informed.



We both played chess. We both believed in God.

Houses here loomed over the street, and we saw a middle-aged woman get out of her car and take a baby stroller from the rear seat and unfold it. Then she took four grocery bags from the car, one at a time, and placed each in the stroller. We were talking and watching. We were talking about epidemics, pandemics, and plagues, but we were watching the woman. She shut the car door and pulled the stroller backward over the hard-packed snow on the sidewalk and up the long flight of steps to her porch.

"What's her name?"

"Isabel," I said.

"Be serious. We're serious people. What's her name?"

"O.K., what's her name?"

"Her name is Mary Frances. Listen to me," he whispered. "*Mar-y Fran-ces.* Never just Mary."

"O.K., maybe."

"Where the hell do you get Isabel?"

He showed mock concern, placing a hand on my shoulder.

"I don't know. Isabel's her sister. They're identical twins. Isabel's the alcoholic twin. But you're missing the central questions."

"No, I'm not. Where's the baby that goes with the stroller? Whose baby is it?" he said. "What's the baby's name?"

We started down the street that led out of town and heard aircraft from the military base. I turned and looked up and they were there and gone, three fighter jets wheeling to the east, and then I saw the hooded man a hundred yards away, coming over the crest of a steep street, headed in our direction.

I said, "Don't look now."

Todd turned and looked. I talked him into crossing the street to put some space between the man and us. We watched from a driveway, standing under a weathered backboard-and-rim fastened to the ridge beam above the garage door. A pickup went by, and the man stopped briefly, then walked on.

"See the coat. No toggles," I said.

"Because it's an anorak."

"It's a parka—it was always a parka. Hard to tell from here, but I think he shaved. Or someone shaved him. Whoever he lives with. A son or daughter, grandkids."

He was directly across the street from us now, moving cautiously to avoid stretches of unshovelled snow.

"He's not from here," Todd said. "He's from somewhere in Europe. They brought him over. He couldn't take care of himself anymore. His wife died. They wanted to stay where they were, the two elderly people. But then she died."

He was speaking distantly, Todd was, watching the man but talking through him, finding his shadow somewhere on the other side of the world. The man did not see us, I was sure of this. He reached the corner, one of his hands behind his back, the other making small conversational gestures, and then he turned onto the next street and was gone.

"Did you see his shoes?"

"They weren't boots."

"They were shoes that reach to the ankle."

"High shoes."

"Old World."

"No gloves."

"Jacket below the knees."

"Possibly not his."

"A hand-me-down or hand-me up."

"Think of the hat he'd be wearing if he was wearing a hat," I said.

"He's not wearing a hat."

"But if he was wearing a hat, what kind of hat?"

"He's wearing a hood."

"But what kind of hat, if he was wearing a hat?"

"He's wearing a hood," Todd said.

We walked down to the corner now and started across the street. He spoke an instant before I did.

"There's only one kind of hat he could conceivably wear. A hat with an earflap that reaches from one ear around the back of the head to the other ear. An old soiled cap. A peaked cap with a flap for the ears."

I said nothing. I had nothing to say to this.

There was no sign of the man along the street he'd entered. For a couple of seconds, an aura of mystery hovered over the scene. But his disappearance simply meant that he lived in one of the houses on the street. Did it matter which house? I didn't think it mattered, but Todd disagreed. He wanted a house that matched the man.

We walked slowly down the middle of the street, six feet apart, using rutted car tracks in the snow to make the going easier. He took off a glove and extended his hand, fingers spread and flexing.

"Feel the air. I say minus nine Celsius."

"We're not Celsius."

"But he is, where he's from, that's Celsius."

"Where *is* he from? There's something not too totally white about him. He's not Scandinavian."

"Not Dutch or Irish."

I wondered about Andalusian. Where was Andalusia exactly? I didn't think I knew. Or an Uzbek, a Kazakh. But these seemed irresponsible.

"Middle Europe," Todd said. "Eastern Europe."

He pointed to a gray frame house, an ordinary two-story, with a shingled roof and no sign of the fallen grace that defined some of the houses elsewhere in town.

"Could be that one. His family allows him to take a walk now and then, provided he stays within a limited area."

"The cold doesn't bother him much."

"He's used to colder."

"Plus, he has very little feeling in his extremities," I said.

There was no Christmas wreath on the front door, no holiday lights. I didn't see anything about the property that might suggest who lived there, from what background, speaking which language. We approached the point where the street ended in a patch of woods, and we turned and headed back.

We had class in half an hour, and I wanted to speed up the pace. Todd was still looking at houses. I thought of the Baltic states and the Balkan states, briefly confused—which was which and which was where.

I spoke before he did.

"I see him as a figure who escaped the

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"It was a lot more satisfying before 'catch and release.' "

war in the nineteen-nineties. Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia. Or who didn't leave until recently."

"I don't feel that here," he said. "It's not the right model."

"Or he's Greek, and his name is Spyros."

"I wish you a painless death," he said, not bothering to look my way.

"German names. Names with umlauts."

This last had nothing but nuisance value. I knew that. I tried walking faster, but he paused a moment, standing in his skewed way to look at the gray house.

"In a few hours, think of it, dinner's over, the others are watching TV, he's in his little room sitting on the edge of a narrow bed in his long johns, staring into space."

I wondered if this was a space that Todd expected us to fill.

We waited through the long silences and then nodded when he coughed, in collegial approval. He'd coughed only twice so far today. There was a small puckered bandage at the edge of his jaw. He shaves, we thought. He cuts himself and says shit. He wads up a sheet of toilet paper and holds it to the cut. Then he leans into the mirror, seeing himself clearly for the first time in years. Ilgauskas, he thinks.

We never took the same seats, class after class. We weren't sure how this had started. One of us, in a spirit of offhand mischief, may have spread the word that Ilgauskas preferred it this way. In fact the idea had substance. He didn't want to know who we were. We were passersby to him, smeary faces, we were roadkill. It was an aspect of his neurological condition, we thought, to regard others as displaceable, and this seemed interesting, seemed part of the course, displaceability, one of the truth functions that he referred to now and then.

But we were violating the code, the shy girl and I, seated face to face once again. This happened because I had entered the room after she did and had simply fallen into the empty chair directly across from her. She knew I was there, knew it was me, same gaping lad, eager to make eye contact.

"Imagine a surface of no color whatsoever," he said.

We sat there and imagined. He ran a hand through his dark hair, a shaggy mass that flopped in several directions. He did not bring books to class, never a sign of the textbook or a sheaf of notes, and his shambling discourses made us feel that we were becoming what he saw before him, an amorphous entity. We were basically stateless. He could have been speaking to political prisoners in orange jumpsuits. We admired this. We were in the Cellblock, after all. We exchanged glances, she and I, tentatively. Ilgauskas leaned toward the table, eyes swimming with neurochemical life. He looked at the wall, talked to the wall.

"Logic ends where the world ends," he said.

The world, yes. But he seemed to be speaking with his back to the world. Then again the subject was not history or geography. He was instructing us in the principles of pure reason. We listened intently. One remark dissolved into the next. He was an artist, an abstract artist. He asked a series of questions, and we made earnest notes. The questions he asked were unanswerable, at least by us, and he was not expecting answers, in any case. We did not speak in class; no one ever spoke. There were never any questions, student to professor. That steadfast tradition was dead here.

He said, "Facts, pictures, things."

What did he mean by "things"? We would probably never know. Were we too passive, too accepting of the man? Did we see dysfunction and call it an inspired form of intellect? We didn't want to like him, only to believe in him. We tendered our deepest trust to the stark nature of his methodology. Of course, there was no methodology. There was only Ilgauskas. He challenged our reason for being, what we thought, how we lived, the truth or falsity of what we believed to be true or false. Isn't this what great teachers do, the Zen masters and Brahman scholars?

He leaned toward the table and spoke about meanings fixed in advance. We listened hard and tried to understand. But to understand at this point in our study, months along, would have been confusing, even a kind of disillusionment. He said something in Latin, hands pressed flat to the tabletop, and then he did a strange thing. He looked at us, eyes gliding up one row of faces, down the other. We were all there, we were always there, our usual shrouded selves. Finally, he raised his hand and looked at his watch. It didn't matter what time it was. The gesture itself meant that class was over.

A meaning fixed in advance, we thought.

We sat there, she and I, while the others gathered books and papers and lifted coats off chair backs. She was pale and thin, hair pinned back, and I had an idea that she wanted to look neutral, seem neutral in order to challenge people to notice her. She placed her textbook on top of her notebook, centering it precisely, then raised her head and waited for me to say something.

"O.K., what's your name?"

"Jenna. What's yours?"

"I want to say Lars-Magnus just to see if you believe me."

"I don't."

"It's Robby," I said.

"I saw you working out in the fitness center."

"I was on the elliptical. Where were you?"

"Just passing by, I guess."

"Is that what you do?"

"Pretty much all the time," she said.

The last to leave were shuffling out now. She stood and dropped her books into her backpack, which dangled from the chair. I remained where I was, watching.

"I'm curious to know what you have to say about this man."

"The professor."

"Do you have insights to offer?"

"I talked to him once," she said. "Person to person."

"Are you serious? Where?"

"At the diner in town."

"You talked to him?"

"I get off-campus urges. I have to go somewhere."

"I know the feeling."

"It's the only place to eat, other than here, so I walked in and sat down and there he was in the booth across the aisle."

"That's incredible."

"I sat there and thought, It's him."

"It's him."

"There was a big foldout menu that I hid behind while I kept sneaking looks. He was eating a full meal, something slopped in brown gravy from the center of the earth. And he had a Coke with a straw bending out of the can."

"You talked to him."

"I said something not too original, and we talked off and on. He had his coat thrown onto the seat opposite him, and I was eating a salad, and there was a book lying on top of his coat, and I asked him what he was reading."

"You talked to him. The man who makes you lower your eyes in primitive fear and dread."

"It was a diner. He was drinking Coke through a straw," she said.

"Fantastic. What was he reading?"

"He said he was reading Dostoevsky. I'll tell you exactly what he said. He said, 'Dostoevsky day and night.' "

"Fantastic."

"And I told him my coincidence, that I'd been reading a lot of poetry and I'd read a poem just a couple of days earlier with a phrase I recalled. 'Like midnight in Dostoevsky.' "

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Does he read Dostoevsky in the original?"

"I didn't ask."

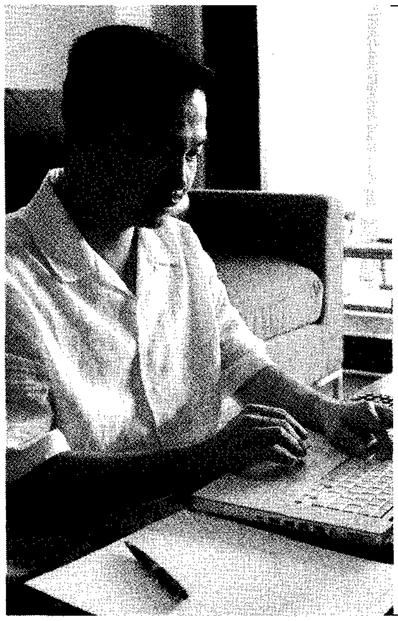
"I wonder if he does. I have a feeling he does."

There was a pause, and then she said that she was leaving school. I was thinking about Ilgauskas in the diner. She told me that she wasn't happy here, that her mother always said how accomplished she was at being unhappy. She was heading west, she said, to Idaho. I didn't say anything. I sat there with my hands folded at my belt line. She left without a coat. Her coat was probably in the coatrack on the first floor.

At the winter break I stayed on campus, one of the few. We called ourselves the Left Behind and spoke in broken English. The routine included zombie body posture and blurred vision, lasting half a day before we'd all had enough.

At the gym I did my dumb struts on the elliptical and lapsed into spells of lost thought. Idaho, I thought. Idaho, the word, so vowelled and obscure. Wasn't where we were, right here, obscure enough for her?

The library was deserted during the



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break. I entered with a key card and took a novel by Dostoevsky down from the shelves. I placed the book on a table and opened it and then leaned down into the splayed pages, reading and breathing. We seemed to assimilate each other, the characters and I, and when I raised my head I had to tell myself where I was.

I knew where my father was—in Beijing, trying to wedge his securities firm into the Chinese century. My mother was adrift, possibly in the Florida Keys with a former boyfriend named Raúl. My father pronounced it *raw-eel*, like a thing you eat with your eyes closed.

In snowfall, the town looked ghosted over, dead still at times. I took walks nearly every afternoon, and the man in the hooded coat was never far from my mind. I walked up and down the street where he lived, and it seemed only fitting that he was not to be seen. This was an essential quality of the place. I began to feel intimate with these streets. I was myself here, able to see things singly and plainly, away from the only life I'd known, the city, stacked and layered, a thousand meanings a minute.

On the stunted commercial street in town, there were three places still open for business, one of them the diner, and I ate there once and stuck my head in the door two or three times, scanning the booths. The sidewalk was old, pocked bluestone. In the convenience store, I bought a fudge bar and talked to the woman behind the counter about her son's wife's kidney infection.

At the library, I devoured about a hundred pages a sitting, small cramped type. When I left the building the book remained on the table, open to the page where I'd stopped reading. I returned the next day, and the book was still there, open to the same page.

Why did this seem magical? Why did I sometimes lie in bed, moments from sleep, and think of the book in the empty room, open to the page where I'd stopped reading?

On one of those midnights, just before classes resumed, I got out of bed and went down the hall to the sun parlor. The area was enclosed by a slanted canopy of partitioned glass, and I unlatched a panel and swung it open. My pajamas seemed to evaporate. I felt the cold in my pores, my teeth. I thought my teeth were ringing. I stood and looked, I was always looking. I felt like a child now, responding to a dare. How long could I take it? I peered into the northern sky, the living sky, my breath turning to little bursts of smoke, as if I were separating from my body. I'd come to love the cold, but this was idiotic, and I closed the panel and went back to my room. I paced awhile, swinging my arms across my chest, trying to roil the blood, warm the body, and twenty minutes after I was back in bed, wide awake, the idea came to mind. It came from nowhere, from the night, fully formed, extending in several directions, and when I opened my eyes in the morning it was all around me, filling the room.

Those afternoons the light died quickly and we talked nearly nonstop, race-walking into the wind. Every topic had spectral connections, Todd's congenital liver condition shading into my ambition to run a marathon, this leading to that, the theory of prime numbers to the living sight of rural mailboxes set along a lost road, eleven standing units, rusted over and near collapse, a prime number, Todd announced, using his cell phone to take a picture.

One day, we approached the street where the hooded man lived. This was when I told Todd about the idea I'd had, the revelation in the icy night. I knew who the man was, I said. Everything fit, every element, the man's origins, his family ties, his presence in this town.

He said, "O.K."

"First, he's a Russian."

"A Russian."

"He's here because his son is here."

"He doesn't have the bearing of a Russian."

"The bearing? What's the bearing? His name could easily be Pavel."

"No, it couldn't."

"Great name possibilities. Pavel, Mikhail, Aleksei. Viktor with a 'k.' His late wife was Tatiana."

We stopped and looked down the street toward the gray frame house designated as the place where the man lived.

"Listen to me," I said. "His son lives in this town because he teaches at the college. His name is Ilgauskas."

I waited for him to be stunned.

"Ilgauskas is the son of the man in the hooded coat," I said. "Our Ilgauskas. They're Russian, father and son."

I pointed at him and waited for him to point back.

He said, "Ilgauskas is too old to be the man's son."

"He's not even fifty. The man is in his seventies, easy. Mid-seventies, most likely. It fits, it works."

"Is Ilgauskas a Russian name?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"Somewhere else, somewhere nearby, but not necessarily Russian," he said.

We stood there looking toward the house. I should have anticipated this kind of resistance, but the idea had been so striking that it had overwhelmed my cautious instincts.

"There's something you don't know about Ilgauskas."

He said, "O.K."

"He reads Dostoevsky day and night."

I knew that he would not ask how I'd come upon this detail. It was a fascinating detail, and it was mine, not his, which meant that he would let it pass without comment. But the silence was a brief one.

"Does he have to be Russian to read Dostoevsky?"

"That's not the point. The point is that it all fits together. It's a formulation, it's artful, it's structured."

"He's American, Ilgauskas, same as we are."

"A Russian is always Russian. He even speaks with a slight accent."

"I don't hear an accent."

"You have to listen. It's there," I said.

I didn't know whether it was there or not. The Norway maple didn't have to be Norway. We worked spontaneous variations on the source material of our surroundings.

"You say the man lives in that house. I accept this," I said. "I say he lives there with his son and his son's wife. Her name is Irina."

"And the son. Ilgauskas, so called. His first name?"

"We don't need a first name. He's Ilgauskas. That's all we need," I said.

His hair was mussed, suit jacket dusty and stained, ready to come apart at the shoulder seams. He leaned into the table, square-jawed, sleepy-looking.

"If we isolate the stray thought, the passing thought," he said, "the thought whose origin is unfathomable, then we begin to understand that we are routinely deranged, everyday crazy."

We loved the idea of being everyday crazy. It rang so true, so real.

"In our privatest mind," he said, "there is only chaos and blur. We invented logic to beat back our creatural selves. We assert or deny. We follow 'M' with 'N.' "

Our privatest mind, we thought. Did he really say that?

"The only laws that matter are laws of thought."

His fists were clenched on the tabletop, knuckles white.

"The rest is devil worship," he said.

We went walking but did not see the man. The wreaths were mostly gone from the front doors and the occasional bundled figure scraped snow off a car's windshield. Over time, we began to understand that these walks were not casual off-campus rambles. We were not looking at trees or boxcars, as we normally did, naming, counting, categorizing. This was different. There was a measure to the man in the hooded coat, old stooped body, face framed in monkish cloth, a history, a faded drama. We wanted to see him one more time.

We agreed on this, Todd and I, and collaborated, in the meantime, on describing his day.

He drinks coffee black, from a small cup, and spoons cereal out of a child's bowl. His head practically rests in the bowl when he bends to eat. He never looks at a newspaper. He goes back to his room after breakfast, where he sits and thinks. His daughter-in-law comes in and makes the bed, Irina.

Although Todd did not concede the binding nature of the name.

Some days we had to wrap scarves around our faces and speak in muffled voices, only our eyes exposed to the street and the weather.

There are two schoolchildren and one smaller girl, Irina's sister's child, here for reasons not yet determined, and the old man often passes the morning fitfully watching TV cartoons with the child, though not seated beside her. He occupies an armchair well away from the TV set, dozing now and then. Mouth open, we said. Head tilted and mouth hanging open.

We weren't sure why we were doing this. But we tried to be scrupulous, adding

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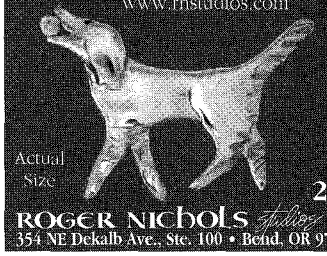

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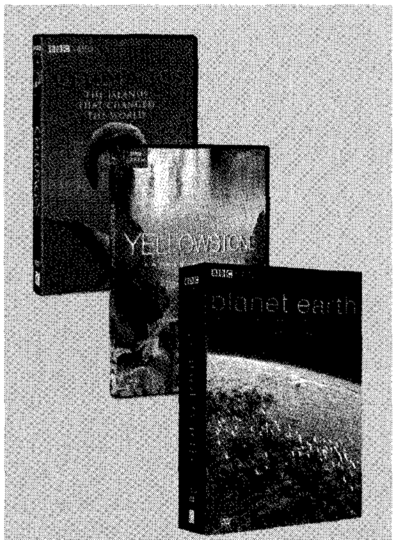

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Soup for lunch, every day it's soup, homemade, and he holds his big spoon over the soup bowl, the old-country bowl, in a manner not unlike the child's, ready to plant a trowel and scoop.

Todd said that Russia was too big for the man. He'd get lost in the vast expanse. Think about Romania, Bulgaria. Better yet, Albania. Is he a Christian, a Muslim? With Albania, he said, we deepen the cultural context. "Context" was his fallback word.

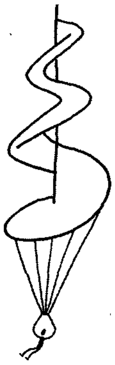
When he is ready for his walk, Irina tries to help him button his parka, his anorak, but he shakes her off with a few brusque words. She shrugs and replies in kind.

I realized I'd forgotten to tell Todd that Ilgauskas read Dostoevsky in the original. This was a feasible truth, a usable truth. It made Ilgauskas, in context, a Russian.

He wears trousers with suspenders.

Until we decided that he didn't; it was too close to stereotype. Who shaved the old man? Did he do it himself? We didn't want him to. But who did it and how often?

This was my crystalline link: the old man to Ilgauskas to Dostoevsky to Russia. I thought about it all the time. Todd said it would become my life's work. I would spend my life in a thought bubble, purifying the link.



He doesn't have a private toilet. He shares a toilet with the children but never seems to use it. He is as close to being invisible as a man can get in a household of six. Sitting, thinking, disappearing on his walk.

We shared a vision of the man in his bed, at night, mind roaming back—the village, the hills, the family dead. We walked the same streets every day, obsessively, and we spoke in subdued tones even when we disagreed. It was part of the dialectic, our looks of thoughtful disapproval.

He probably smells bad, but the only one who seems to notice is the oldest child, a girl, thirteen. She makes faces now and then, passing behind his chair at the dinner table.

It was the tenth straight sunless day. The number was arbitrary, but the mood was beginning to bear down, not the cold or the wind but the missing light, the missing man. Our voices took on an anxious cadence. It occurred to us that he might be dead.

We talked about this all the way back to campus.

Do we make him dead? Do we keep assembling the life posthumously? Or do we end it now, tomorrow, the next day, stop coming to town, stop looking for him? One thing I knew: he does not die Albanian.

The next day, we stood at the end of the street where the designated house was located. We were there for an hour, barely speaking. Were we waiting for him to appear? I don't think we knew. What if he came out of the wrong house? What would this mean? What if someone else came out of the designated house, a young couple carrying ski equipment toward the car in the driveway? Maybe we were there simply to show deferential regard, standing quietly in the presence of the dead.

No one emerged, no one went in, and we left feeling unsure of ourselves.

Minutes later, approaching the railroad tracks, we saw him. We stopped and pointed at each other, holding the pose a moment. It was enormously satisfying, it was thrilling, to see the thing happen, see it become three-dimensional. He made a turn into a street at a right angle to the one we were on. Todd hit me on the arm, turned, and started jogging. Then I started jogging. We were going back in the direction we'd just come from. We went around one corner, ran down the street, went around another corner, and waited. In time, he appeared, walking now in our direction.

This was what Todd wanted, to see him head on. We moved toward him. He seemed to walk a sort of pensive route, meandering with his thoughts. I pulled Todd toward the curb with me so that the man would not have to pass between us. We waited for him to see us. We could almost count off the footsteps to the instant when he would raise his head. It was an interval drawn taut with detail. We were close enough to see the sunken face, heavily stubbled, pinched in around the mouth, jaw sagging. He saw us now and paused, one hand gripping a button at the front of his coat. He looked haunted inside the shabby hood. He looked misplaced, isolated, someone who could easily be the man we were in the process of imagining.

We walked on past and continued for eight or nine paces, then turned and watched.

"That was good," Todd said. "That was totally worthwhile. Now we're ready to take the next step."

"There is no next step. We got our close look," I said. "We know who he is."

"We don't know anything."

"We wanted to see him one more time."

"Lasted only seconds."

"What do you want to do, take a picture?"

"My cell phone needs recharging," he said seriously. "The coat is an anorak, by the way, definitely, up close."

"The coat is a parka."

The man was two and a half blocks from the left turn that would put him on the street where he lived.

"I think we need to take the next step."

"You said that."

"I think we need to talk to him."

I looked at Todd. He wore a fixed smile, grafted on.

"That's crazy."

"It's completely reasonable," he said.

"We do that, we kill the idea, we kill everything we've done. We can't talk to him."

"We'll ask a few questions, that's all. Quiet, low key. Find out a few things."

"It's never been a matter of literal answers."

"I counted eighty-seven boxcars. You counted eighty-seven boxcars. Remember."

"This is different, and we both know it."

"I can't believe you're not curious. All we're doing is searching out the parallel life," he said. "It doesn't affect what we've been saying all this time."

"It affects everything. It's a violation. It's crazy."

I looked down the street toward the man in question. He was still moving slowly, a little erratically, hands folded behind his back now, where they belonged.

"If you're sensitive about approaching him, I'll do it," he said.

"No, you won't."

"Why not?"

"Because he's old and frail. Because he won't understand what you want."

"What do I want? A few words of conversation. If he shies away, I'm out of there in an instant."

"Because he doesn't even speak English."

"You don't know that. You don't know anything."

He started to move away, and I clutched his arm and turned him toward me.

"Because you'll scare him," I said. "Just the sight of you. Freak of nature."

He looked straight into me. It took time, this look. Then he pulled his arm away, and I shoved him into the street. He turned and started walking, and I caught up with him and spun him around and struck him in the chest with the heel of my hand. It was a sample blow, an introduction. A car came toward us and veered away, faces in windows. We began to grapple. He was too awkward to be contained, all angles, a mess of elbows and knees, and deceptively strong. I had trouble getting a firm grip and lost a glove. I wanted to hit him in the liver but didn't know where it was. He began flailing in slow motion. I moved in and punched him on the side of the head with my bare hand. It hurt us both, and he made a sound and went into a fetal crouch. I snatched his cap and tossed it. I wanted to wrestle him down and pound his head into the asphalt, but he was too firmly set, still making the sound, a determined hum, science fiction. He unfolded then, flushed and wild-eyed, and started swinging blind. I stepped back and half circled, waiting for an opening, but he fell before I could hit him, scrambling up at once and starting to run.

The hooded man was about to move out of sight, turning into his street. I watched Todd run, long, slack, bouncy strides. He would have to go faster if he expected to reach the man before he disappeared into the gray frame house, the designated house.

I saw my lost glove lying in the middle of the street. Then Todd running, bareheaded, trying to skirt areas of frozen snow. The scene empty everywhere around him. I couldn't make sense of it. I felt completely detached. His breath visible, streams of trailing vapor. I wondered what it was that had caused this thing to happen. He only wanted to talk to the man. ♦

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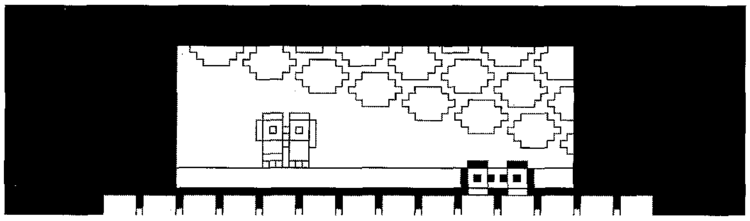


THE THEATRE

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Sarah Ruhl and "Finian's Rainbow" score.

BY JOHN LAHR

In our pornographic age, it's hard to imagine that there was a time when people were better acquainted with the continent of Africa than with their own bodies. Sarah Ruhl's "In the Next Room or the Vibrator Play" (superbly directed by Les Waters, at the Lyceum) takes us back to the corseted, alabaster eighteen-eighties, in the early days of electricity, when the vibrator was used by physicians to enhance a form of genital massage, which had been practiced for centuries as a treatment for hysteria. The procedure was thought to provide a workout for the neglected womb; it resulted in a heavy-breathing rictus, sometimes accompanied by discharge, which led to a release of tension. (Back then, "the big O" was called a "hysterical paroxysm.")

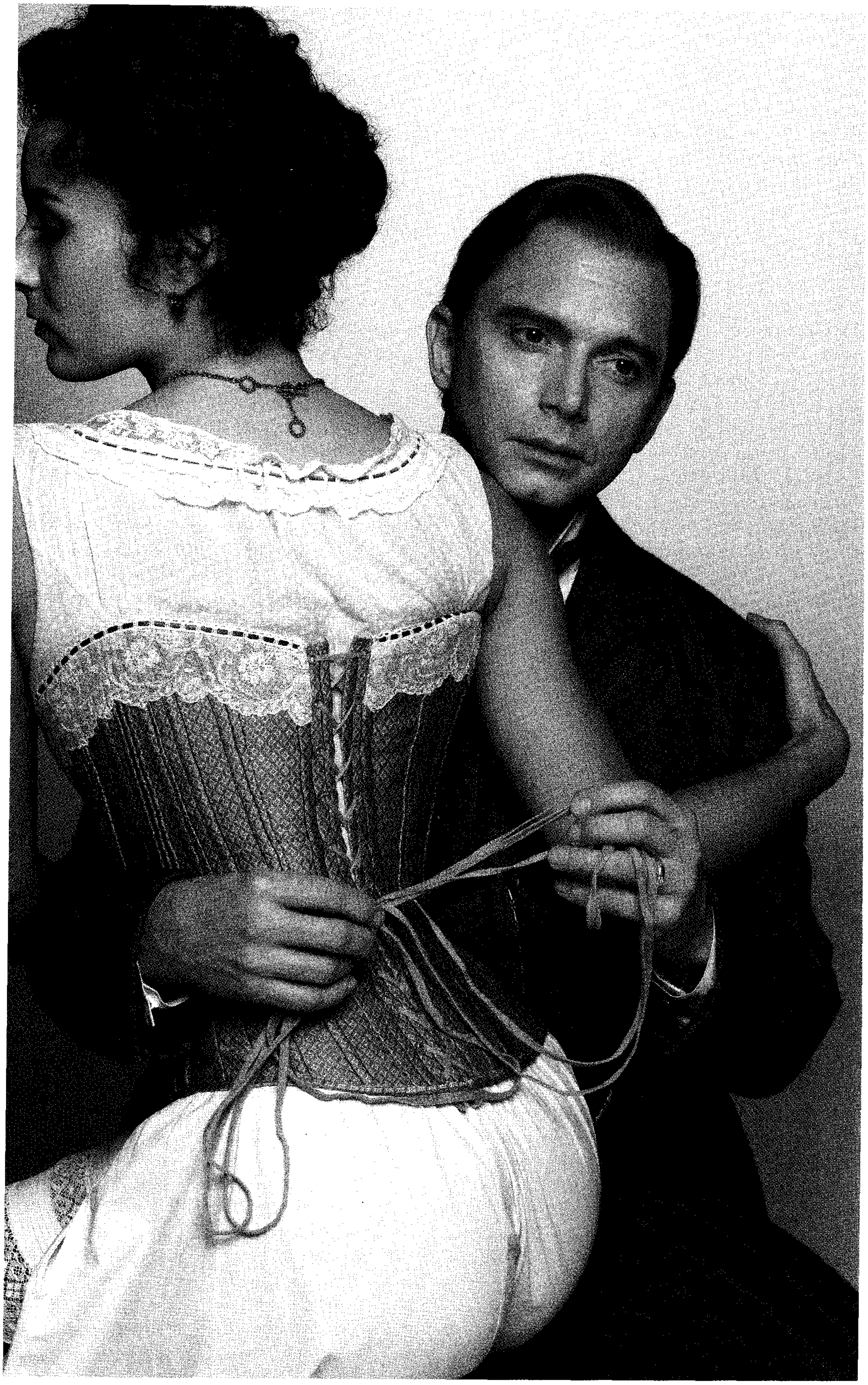
"In the Next Room" brings scintillating news of the politics of desire, scientific history, and sexual behavior. Part of the comedy of Ruhl's play—her most commercial and her best to date—is her nonjudgmental attack on a sensational subject. Ruhl hides her impish intelligence behind a simple style, maintaining a droll, detached sense of wonder at both the sexual ignorance and the sexual discoveries of her characters. "I will tell you an amusing story," the earnest Dr. Givings (Michael Cerveris) says, launching into a tale about Benjamin Franklin electrocuting a turkey, as he applies a vibrator to a "frigid" patient, Mrs. Daldry (the excellent Maria Dizzia), who writhes slowly under the sheets on his examination table. After a while, he asks, "Do you feel calmer?" "A little," she gasps. ("She has a quiet paroxysm," Ruhl's stage directions read. "Now remember that these are the days before digital pornography. There is no cliché of how women are supposed to orgasm, no idea in their heads of how they are supposed to sound.")

In a low-key but daring way, Ruhl has extended the geography of the comedy of manners. Sex is always complicated, therefore always funny; Ruhl, however, never laughs at her bewildered, repressed characters, who are either lumbered by frustrations that they can't explain or reeling with a desire for which they have no words. This game of positive and negative charges, a sort of alternating current, is announced in the play's first beat, when Dr. Givings's sweetly scatterbrained wife, Catherine (the pert Laura Benanti), plays with an electric light to amuse her newborn daughter. "Straight from man's imagination into our living room," she says. "On, off, on, off, on—" The sexual, as well as the electric, current has been turned on, and a revolution in living is about to be wrought. "In the Next Room" gives "the body electric" a whole new meaning.

In Annie Smart's handsome set, the doctor's office—his "operating theatre"—is adjacent to his well-appointed living room: a sort of split screen of psychological realms. In the office, patients are carried from emotional distress to release. After a manual session with the doctor's assistant, Annie (Wendy Rich Stetson), Mrs. Daldry finds herself calling out Annie's name the next time around. Another patient, Leo Irving (Chandler Williams), a jilted artist who hasn't been able to paint for almost a year, is treated to an interlude with a greased-up instrument called the Chattanooga Vibrator. All the patients reënter the living room beaming, energized, reborn. In this pre-Freudian moment, they are unaware that their habit of forgetting items of clothing at the doctor's office—which they must later return to claim—reveals their attachment to the new erotic pleasure. At one point, the rejuvenated Mrs. Daldry, whose presenting symptoms included stiff fingers, is coaxed by Catherine to play the piano in the living room. "It's hardly been used, you must play it," Catherine burbles. "The poor thing is *languishing* without a human touch. It's like a piece of dead wood without being played." Catherine, it turns out, is speaking about herself.

While Dr. Givings is treating hysteria in his office, his benevolent inattentiveness is fuelling it at home. He can't see the aggressiveness of his patriarchal passivity, but we can. On his first entrance, Dr. Givings, scuttling to his inner sanctum, walks past his wife without so much as a glance in her direction. In his second scene, he insists that she and the baby hide from a new client; they hunker down behind the piano until the patient is safely in the office. There is no place for Catherine in the house, or in her husband's imagination. He literally and figuratively can't take her in. When she confesses her guilt over not being able to breastfeed her baby properly—a wet nurse is needed—he, in one breath, both puts her down and dismisses her sense of maternal failure. "Your milk isn't adequate," he says. "I love you." At another point, he insists, "We are healthy and happy, are we not?" Not. Because Catherine is attractive and dutiful, it takes us a while to realize that her chattering, her hostile faux pas, her acting out (she listens by the office door), and her appetite for vigorous exercise ("I walk walk walk no one can keep up with me not even Dr. Givings") signal her hysterical dissatisfaction. When she

ABOVE: TIBOR KÁRPÁTI



ildered: Benanti and Cerveris in "In the Next Room or the Vibrator Play." Photograph by Max Vadukul.

begs her husband to "experiment" on her, he smugly dismisses her. "You are my blooming young wife without a hint of neurosis," he says.

Denied her husband's medical expertise, Catherine, with the help of Mrs. Daldry, who has become an aficionado of the vibrator, breaks into his locked office; the two women take matters into their own hands, so to speak. "In this day and age, all one has to know how to do is press a button or pull a switch. I'll hold it for you," Catherine says, amazed that the vibrator "looks like a farming tool." Together, they embark on the appliance of science. "They look heavenwards," the stage directions read at the end of Act I. "The steady hum of the vibrator. Transcendent music. A curtain falls."

Once the erotic is unleashed, emotional anarchy is certain to follow. Ruhl's playwriting is inspired; in the second act, she never falters as she puts her characters through the paces of passion with a special high-comic gravity and grace. Jealousies erupt; passes are clumsily made, kisses exchanged, faces slapped, hearts elated and dashed. At one crucial point, Dr. Givings relents and gives his wife a proper treatment. "No, kiss me now. Kiss me and hold the instrument there, just there at the same time," she says, embracing him passionately. "This is what I feared," Dr. Givings says, bridling. "In a sick woman, the device restores balance, but in a healthy woman it makes you excitable and perhaps even causes some perverse kind of onanism." He gives her a polite kiss; she calls him "inadequate." The standoff is resolved only at the finale, which feels—and almost sounds—Shakespearean. "What is it, then, this very particular way in which you love me? What color? What temperature?" Catherine says, trying to coax her husband's timid heart out into the open. Dr. Givings responds in the only idiom he knows. He kisses his wife's face and announces his feeling for each spot: "I bless thee: temporomandibular joint / I bless thee: buccal artery and nerve."

The sense of longing that haunts the play—"Love me. Love me for your job," Catherine pleads—is dispelled in its thrilling, poetic final image. The set, with all its bourgeois trappings, falls away, and the play moves from comedy of manners to vision: in a surreal and exquisite encounter, which plays as a "mad pilgrimage of the flesh," to borrow Tennessee Williams's phrase, Dr. Givings and his wife face each other in their snowy garden. Catherine undresses her husband. "She has never seen him naked before; she has only seen him under the covers," the stage directions read. His skin glows in the moonlight; she lies on top of him. Together, in their coupling, they make a snow angel. All we can know of Heaven, Ruhl seems to be saying, is the joy we make for one another here on earth.

"Finian's Rainbow" (in revival at the St. James, under the direction of Warren Carlyle) doesn't have Ruhl's narrative brilliance, but it has the lyrics of Yip Harburg and the music of Burton Lane, which are genius enough. The 1947 show was the first full-fledged attempt to marry the African-American folk-musical traditions (gospel, blues) with Broadway panache; the Heaven it sings of is Broadway abundance, but with a distinctive progressive twist and an overlay of social justice. Harburg considered himself a "re-evolutionist"; his game was to mix the political and the playful. In songs like "Necessity" and "That Great Come-and-Get-It Day," he celebrates change, not the status quo. In "When the Idle Poor Become the Idle Rich," for instance, Harburg imagines the democratization of wealth and class:

> When the idle poor become the idle rich
> You'll never know just who is who or who is which. . . .
> No one will see the Irish or the Slav in you,
> For when you're on Park Avenue,
> Cornelius and Mike . . .
> Look alike.

"Finian's Rainbow" is a testament to Harburg's faith in the power of the imagination and of dreaming—"Follow the fellow that follows a dream," one lyric advises. He believed that a new, liberal idea, when transmitted in song, could always "find a soft spot under a hard hat." Glocca Morra, the name of Finian's home town in Ireland (which Harburg made up), carries its own evocative utopian message. "I took two words from the German: *Glück*—luck; *Morgen*—tomorrow. Lucky Tomorrow," he told me in the late seventies. "You like the word 'Glocca Morra' because, whether you know it or not, you connect it with Lucky Tomorrow. For the lyricist, there's a great charm in writing things that get at you subliminally."

The revival features John Lee Beatty's beautiful burlap-and-floral patchwork curtain, well lit by Ken Billington, which sets the perfect mood for this American fantasia. The cast is led by the splendid Jim Norton, as Finian, who steals a pot of gold from a leprechaun in Ireland and wants to bury it near Fort Knox. That's as much plot as you'll get from me, but a tip of the cloth cap to the adapter, Arthur Perlman, and to the producers, David Richenthal and Jack Viertel, for bringing some clarity and crispness to the vexed book, by Fred Saidy and Harburg. Finian's daughter, Sharon, is played by the fine-voiced Kate Baldwin, who gets to sing such standards as "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?," "Look to the Rainbow," and "Old Devil Moon." "You and your glance / make this romance / too hot to handle," she sings to the local hero, Woody Mahoney (the stiff Cheyenne Jackson). Unfortunately for Baldwin, there isn't even a spark of heat between her and the good-looking Jackson. Their songs get across, but they don't land with quite the power they deserve. On the issue of heat, however, Chuck Cooper, as the racist Senator Rawkins, who is turned black by the leprechaun's spell, really cooks with "The Begat," a gospel song about the origins of life:

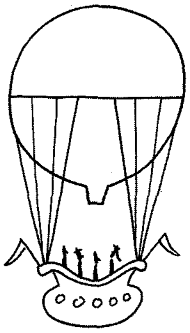
> They begat the Babbits of the bourgeoisie
> Who begat the misbegotten G.O.P.

Harburg's jokes and his musical feel evergreen. To judge by the lines on Forty-fourth Street, this production of "Finian's Rainbow" will be around for a while, time enough for modern audiences to appreciate a musical master who was never properly in the public discussion in his lifetime. Even in this, Harburg was prescient. "Mozart died a pauper," he quipped in a poem. "Homer begged for bread / Genius pays off handsomely / After you are dead." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Trotsky, *by Robert Service (Harvard; $35).* "I hate Trotsky!" Winston Churchill told the Soviet Ambassador in 1938. "It's a very good thing that Stalin has got even with him." Trotsky, even before one of Stalin's agents found him in Mexico and assassinated him with an ice axe, was a romantic figure to those who believed that if only he had succeeded Lenin everything would have been better. Service, who has also written studies of Lenin and Stalin, does an excellent job of dispensing with such notions. Trotsky "revelled in terror"; at times "it seemed that Trotsky and Stalin were competing for the status of the most brutal commissar." Their difference was one of style and background (Trotsky was Jewish) rather than of decency. Trotsky's fellow-revolutionaries valued his rhetoric, but generally disliked him. (Rosa Luxemburg called him "a rotten fellow.") Service's book, unlike much writing about Trotsky, is the work of a historian, not an ideologue, and the better for it.

Enemies of the People, *by Kati Marton (Simon & Schuster; $26).* Marton's suspenseful memoir is the story of her parents, the Hungarian intellectuals Ilona and Endre Marton. Hailed as the last members of the independent press behind the Iron Curtain, the couple flouted the strictures of the repressive regime. They spoke their minds, drove a flashy convertible, and befriended American and British diplomats and writers. But they were viewed with suspicion by both sides in the Cold War, placed under constant surveillance, and eventually arrested, jailed, and convicted of espionage by the Hungarian government. Years later, when Marton opened her parents' secret-police file, she discovered thousands of pages about their intimate lives, details that kindled her own childhood memories. Her family portrait reconstructs the absurdism of a world where "everybody in your circle, whether your parents trusted or did not trust them, was informing on them."



Bicycle Diaries, *by David Byrne (Viking; $25.95).* Since the nineteen-eighties, Byrne, the co-founder of the band Talking Heads, has been using a folding bicycle to get around the world's major cities, and his new book is both a travelogue and a reflection on gentrifying urban landscapes. A passionate cycling advocate, Byrne rates the bike-friendliness of New Orleans, Istanbul, and points between, and includes an appendix of tips. His observations aren't always profound (an affluent suburb "seems to be everything we say we want—but sometimes when we get what we want it turns out to be a nightmare"), but the curiosity and the engagement he brings to the subject are as evident here as in his other artistic works. Of Detroit's squalor, he writes, "Riding for hours right next to it was visceral and heartbreaking—in ways that looking at ancient ruins aren't. I recommend it."

The Rags of Time, *by Maureen Howard (Viking; $26.95).* In the final volume of Howard's "Four Seasons" quartet, Mimi, a writer plagued by a heart complaint and an obsession with Central Park, visits the Park daily despite her ever-weakening condition. On these rambles, she encounters characters who will be familiar to readers of the previous volumes in the sequence: Artie and Louise, lovers settling into middle age, and Marie Claude, a bereaved academic. Among various unexpected connections—an Austrian graduate student who relates a tale of loss during the Second World War goes on to have an affair with Artie's grandfather—Howard interweaves narratives about Christopher Columbus, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Sir Walter Raleigh, and laments the political state of America under George W. Bush. The intrusion of liberal bromides rings false, as does Howard's elegiac tone: behind the lyrical prose, there's little of substance to mourn.

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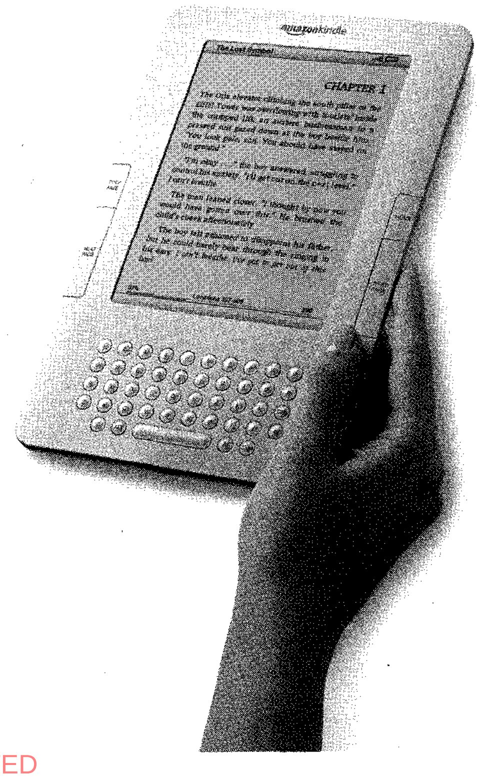


BOOKS

SHALLOW GRAVES

The novels of Paul Auster.

BY JAMES WOOD

Roger Phaedo had not spoken to anyone for ten years. He confined himself to his Brooklyn apartment, obsessively translating and retranslating the same short passage from Rousseau's "Confessions." A decade earlier, a mobster named Charlie Dark had attacked Phaedo and his wife. Phaedo was beaten to within an inch of his life; Mary was set on fire, and survived just five days in the I.C.U. By day, Phaedo translated; at night, he worked on a novel about Charlie Dark, who was never convicted. Then Phaedo drank himself senseless with Scotch. He drank to drown his sorrows, to dull his senses, to forget himself. The phone rang, but he never answered it. Sometimes, Holly Steiner, an attractive woman across the hall, would silently enter his bedroom, and expertly rouse him from his stupor. At other times, he made use of the services of Aleesha, a local hooker. Aleesha's eyes were too hard, too cynical, and they bore the look of someone who had already seen too much. Despite that, Aleesha had an uncanny resemblance to Holly, as if she were Holly's double. And it was Aleesha who brought Roger Phaedo back from the darkness. One afternoon, wandering naked through Phaedo's apartment, she came upon two enormous manuscripts, neatly stacked. One was the Rousseau translation, each page covered with almost identical words; the other, the novel about Charlie Dark. She started leafing through the novel. "Charlie Dark!" she exclaimed. "I knew Charlie Dark! He was one tough cookie. That bastard was in the Paul Auster gang. I'd love to read this book, baby, but I'm always too lazy to read long books. Why don't you read it to me?" And that is how the ten-year silence was broken. Phaedo decided to please Aleesha. He sat down, and started reading the opening paragraph of his novel, the novel you have just read.

Yes, that précis is a parody of Paul Auster's fiction, *l'eau d'Auster* in a sardonic sac. It is unfair, but diligently so, checking off most of his work's familiar features. A protagonist, nearly always male, often a writer or an intellectual, lives monkishly, coddling a loss—a deceased or divorced wife, dead children, a missing brother. Violent accidents perforate the narratives, both as a means of insisting on the contingency of existence and as a means of keeping the reader reading—a woman drawn and quartered in a German concentration camp, a man beheaded in Iraq, a woman severely beaten by a man with whom she is about to have sex, a boy kept in a darkened room for nine years and periodically beaten, a woman accidentally shot in the eye, and so on. The narratives conduct themselves like realistic stories, except for a slight lack of conviction and a general B-movie atmosphere. People say things like "You're one tough cookie, kid," or "My pussy's not for sale," or "It's an old story, pal. You let your dick do your thinking for you, and that's what happens." A visiting text—Chateaubriand, Rousseau, Hawthorne, Poe, Beckett—is elegantly slid into the host book. There are doubles, alter egos, doppelgängers, and appearances by a character named Paul Auster. At the end of the story, the hints that have been scattered like mouse droppings lead us to the postmodern hole in the book where the rodent got in: the revelation that some or all of what we have been reading has probably been imagined by the protagonist. Hey, Roger Phaedo invented Charlie Dark! It was all in his head.

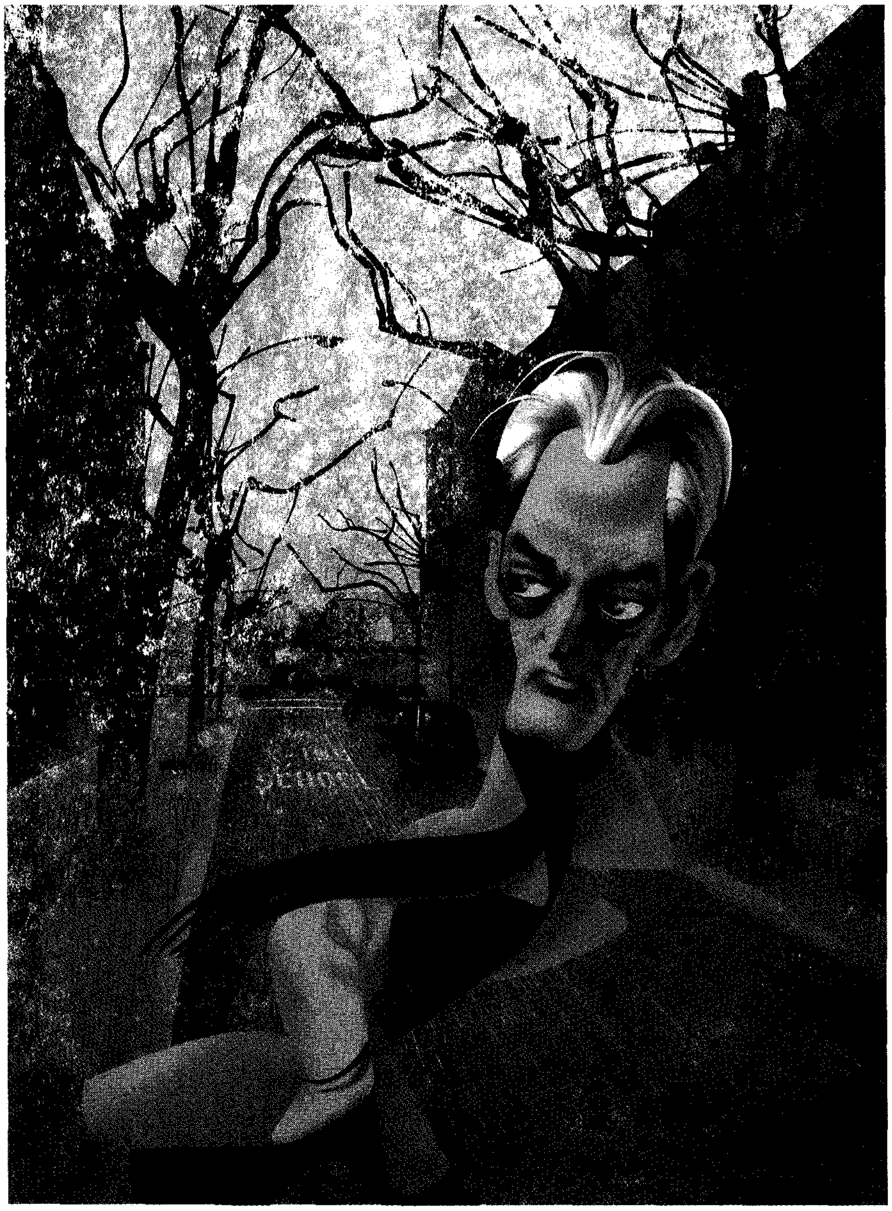
Paul Auster's latest book, "Invisible" (Holt; $25), though it has charm and vitality in places, conforms to the Auster model. It is 1967. Adam Walker, a young poet studying literature at Columbia, mourns the loss of his brother, Andy, who drowned in a lake ten years before the novel opens. At a party, Adam meets the flamboyant and sinister Rudolf Born, Swiss by birth, of German-speaking and French-speaking parentage. Born is a visiting professor, teaching the history of French colonial wars, about which he appears to have decided views. "War is the purest, most vivid expression of the human soul," he tells a startled Adam. He tries to get Adam to sleep with his girlfriend. Later, we learn that he has worked clandestinely for the French government, and may even be a double agent.

Perhaps because Rudolf Born is so obviously a figure from spy movies—Auster could have called his novel "The Born Supremacy"—he never sounds remotely like the person he's supposed to be, a fastidious and well-educated French-speaking European of the nineteen-sixties. He says things like "Your ass will be so cooked, you won't be able to sit down again for the rest of your life," or "We're still working on the stew" (about a lamb *navarin*), or "All I have to do is pull it out of my pants, piss on the fire, and the problem is solved." He takes an immediate interest in Adam, and gives him money to set up a literary magazine. "I see something in you, Walker, something I like," he says, sounding oddly like Burt Lancaster in "Local Hero," "and for some inexplicable reason I find myself willing to take a gamble on you." For "some inexplicable reason," indeed: Auster anxiously confesses his own creative lack.

This being an Auster novel, accidents visit the narrative like automobiles falling from the sky. One evening, while walking along Riverside Drive, Born and Walker are held up by a young black man, Cedric Williams. "The gun was pointed at us, and just like that, with a single tick of the clock, the entire universe had changed" is Walker's banal gloss. Born refuses to hand over his wallet, draws a switchblade, and ruthlessly stabs the young man (whose gun, it turns out, was unloaded). Walker knows that he should call the police, but the next day Born sends a threatening letter: "Not a word, Walker. Remember: I still have the knife, and I'm not afraid to use it." Full of shame, Walker goes to the authorities, but Born has left for Paris.

One might tolerate the corny Born, and his cinemaspeak, if Adam Walker, who narrates much of the novel in one way or another, were not himself such a bland and slack writer. He is supposed to be a dreamy young poet, but he's half in love with easeful cliché. Born "was just thirty-six, but already he was a burnt-out soul, a shattered wreck of a person," we're told. Adam has an affair with Born's girlfriend, but "deep down I knew it was finished." Born was "deep in his cups by the time he poured the cognac." "Why? I said, still reeling from the impact of Born's astounding recitation about my family."

Although there are things to admire in Auster's fiction, the prose is never one of them. (Most of the secondhand cadences in my parody—about drinking to drown his sorrows, or the prostitute's eyes being too hard and having seen too much—are taken verbatim from Auster's previous work.) "Leviathan" (1992), for instance, is supposedly narrated by an American novelist, a stand-in for Paul Auster named Peter Aaron, who tells us about the doomed life of another writer, Benjamin Sachs. But Peter Aaron can't be much of a writer. He describes Benjamin Sachs's first novel like this: "It's a whirlwind performance, a marathon sprint from the first line to the last, and whatever you might think of the book as a whole, it's impossible not to respect the author's energy, the sheer gutsiness of his ambitions." Lest you are tempted to chalk all this up to an unreliable narrator—"But he's *supposed* to write like that"—consider August Brill, the seventy-two-year-old literary critic who narrates Auster's novel "Man in the Dark" (2008). Like Nathan Zuckerman in "The Ghost Writer," he lies awake in a New England house, inventing fantastic fictions. (He imagines an alternative universe, in which America is fighting a bitter civil war over the fate of the 2000 election.) When he thinks about actual America, however, his language stiffens into boilerplate. Recalling the Newark riots of 1968, he describes a member of the New Jersey State Police, "a certain Colonel Brand or Brandt, a man of around forty with a razor-sharp crew cut, a square, clenched jaw, and the hard eyes of a marine about to embark on a commando mission."



For all the postmodern maneuvers, Auster is the least ironic of contemporary writers.

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

Clichés, borrowed language, bourgeois *bêtises* are intricately bound up with modern and postmodern literature. For Flaubert, the cliché and the received idea are beasts to be toyed with and then slain. "Madame Bovary" actually italicizes examples of foolish or sentimental phrasing. Charles Bovary's conversation is likened to a pavement, over which many people have walked; twentieth-century literature, violently conscious of mass culture, extends this idea of the self as a kind of borrowed tissue, full of other people's germs. Among modern and postmodern writers, Beckett, Nabokov, Richard Yates, Thomas Bernhard, Muriel Spark, Don DeLillo, Martin Amis, and David Foster Wallace have all employed and impaled cliché in their work. Paul Auster is probably America's best-known postmodern novelist; his "New York Trilogy" must have been read by thousands who do not usually read avant-garde fiction. Auster clearly shares this engagement with mediation and borrowedness—hence, his cinematic plots and rather bogus dialogue—and yet he does nothing with cliché except use it.

This is bewildering, on its face, but then Auster is a peculiar kind of postmodernist. Or is he a postmodernist at all? Eighty per cent of a typical Auster novel proceeds in a manner indistinguishable from American realism; the remaining twenty per cent does a kind of postmodern surgery on the eighty per cent, often casting doubt on the veracity of the plot. Nashe, in "The Music of Chance" (1990), sounds as if he had sprung from a Raymond Carver story (although Carver would have written more interesting prose):

> He drove for seven straight hours, paused momentarily to fill up the tank with gas, and then continued for another six hours until exhaustion finally got the better of him. He was in north-central Wyoming by then, and dawn was just beginning to lift over the horizon. He checked into a motel, slept solidly for eight or nine hours, and then walked over to the diner next door and put away a meal of steak and eggs from the twenty-four-hour

> breakfast menu. By late afternoon, he was back in the car, and once again he drove clear through the night, not stopping until he had gone halfway through New Mexico.

One reads Auster's novels very fast, because they are lucidly written, because the grammar of the prose is the grammar of the most familiar realism (the kind that is, in fact, comfortingly artificial), and because the plots, full of sneaky turns and surprises and violent irruptions, have what the *Times* once called "all the suspense and pace of a bestselling thriller." There are no semantic obstacles, lexical difficulties, or syntactical challenges. The books fairly hum along. The reason Auster is not a realist writer, of course, is that his larger narrative games are anti-realist or surrealist. In "The Music of Chance," Nashe inherits money from his father, and goes on the road. Eventually, he meets a professional poker player named Jack Pozzi (the name suggestive of "jackpot," and also of Pozzo from "Waiting for Godot"): "It was one of those random, accidental encounters that seem to materialize out of thin air." For no very credible reason, Nashe decides to tag along with Pozzi: "It was as if he finally had no part in what was about to happen to him." The pair end up in the Pennsylvania mansion of two eccentric millionaires, Flower and Stone. Pozzi loses all Nashe's money in a poker game, and the unfortunate duo suddenly owe ten thousand dollars to Flower and Stone, who exact repayment by putting them to work on their estate: their job will be to build, by hand, a huge wall in a field. A trailer is prepared for their quarters. The estate has become a Sisyphean prison yard for Nashe and Pozzi, with Flower and Stone as unreachable gods (Flower's name perhaps gesturing at God's soft side, Stone's at punishment). Nashe gnashes his teeth in this pastoral hell.

In what is probably Auster's best novel, "The Book of Illusions" (2002), David Zimmer, a professor of literature, holes up in Vermont, where he mourns the death of his wife and two sons in a plane crash. "For several months, I lived in a blur of alcoholic grief and self-pity," he says. By chance, he sees a silent film starring Hector Mann, a brilliant actor who disappeared in 1929, and who, it was thought, never made another film. Zimmer decides to write a book about Mann, and the best part of the novel is Auster's painstaking and vivid fictional re-creation of the career of a silent-movie actor of the nineteen-twenties. But the story soon hurtles into absurdity. After his book on Hector Mann is published, Zimmer receives a letter from Mann's wife, Frieda: Mann is alive, though dying, in New Mexico; Zimmer must come at once. He does nothing about the letter, and one evening a strange woman named Alma arrives at Zimmer's house. She orders him, at gunpoint, to the New Mexico ranch. Second-rate dialogue is copiously exchanged. "I'm not your friend. . . . You're a phantom who wandered in from the night, and now I want you to go back out there and leave me alone," Zimmer tells Alma, in one of those ritual moments of temporary resistance we know so well from bad movies. ("Well, buddy, you can count me out of this particular bank heist.")

Alma explains to Zimmer that Hector Mann disappeared in order to hide the traces of a murder: Mann's fiancée accidentally shot his jealous girlfriend. The rest of the book speeds along like something written by a hipper John Irving: Zimmer goes to the ranch with the mysterious Alma; meets Hector Mann, who dies almost immediately; Alma kills Hector's wife, and then commits suicide. And at the end, making good on many helpful suggestions throughout the book, we are encouraged to believe that David Zimmer invented everything we have just read: it was the fiction he needed to raise himself from the near-death of his mourning.

What is problematic about these books is not their postmodern skepticism about the stability of the narrative, which is standard-issue fare, but the gravity and the emotional logic that Auster tries to extract from the "realist" side of his stories. Auster is always at his most solemn at those moments in his books which are least plausible and most ragingly unaffecting. One never really believes in Nashe's bleak solitude, or in David Zimmer's alcoholic grief. In "City of Glass" (1985), Quinn, the protagonist, decides to impersonate a private investigator (who happens to be named Paul Auster). Though he is a solitary writer, and has never done any detective work before, he takes on a case that involves protecting a young man from a potentially violent and insane father, whom he must shadow. He pursues this lunatic father with desperate fervor throughout the book. The motive? Quinn's loss of his wife and son, who died several years before the book begins. Quinn, Auster writes,

> wanted to be there to stop him. He knew he could not bring his own son back to life, but at least he could prevent another from dying. It had suddenly become possible to do

"Before you go, would you mind taking a few moments to fill out a short form rating your relationship experience?"

> this, and standing there on the street now, the idea of what lay before him loomed up like a terrible dream.

This is the kind of balsa-wood backstory that is knocked into Hollywood plots every day. Now, a certain kind of comic postmodernist could play such stuff for laughs, much as, say, the early postmodern Irish writer Flann O'Brien brilliantly undermines all conventional motive and consequence in his hilarious novel "The Third Policeman." But Auster, unlike the reader, seems to believe in the actuality of his characters' motives. He is only ever unwittingly funny. In "The Book of Illusions," an excruciating example of this unintended comedy occurs when Alma tells David Zimmer that Hector Mann and Frieda had a son, Tad, who died as a small child. "Imagine the effect it had on them," she says. Zimmer, who lost his two sons, Marco and Todd, in the plane crash that also killed his wife, says, "I know what you're talking about. No mental gymnastics required to understand the situation. Tad and Todd. It can't get any closer than that, can it?" The reader has the urge to blow a Flann O'Brien-size raspberry. Zimmer sounds less like a grieving father than like a canny deconstructionist leading a graduate seminar: two dead sons, one named Tad and the other Todd! But Auster is death-suited and thin-lipped here: he wants both the emotional credibility of conventional realism and a frisson of postmodern wordplay (a single vowel separates the names, and *Tod* is German for "death").

What Auster often gets instead is the worst of both worlds: fake realism and shallow skepticism. The two weaknesses are related. Auster is a compelling storyteller, but his stories are assertions rather than persuasions. They declare themselves; they hound the next revelation. Because nothing is persuasively assembled, the inevitable postmodern disassembly leaves one largely untouched. (The disassembly is also grindingly explicit, spelled out in billboard-size type.) Presence fails to turn into significant absence, because presence was not present enough. This is the crevasse that divides Auster from novelists like José Saramago, or the Philip Roth of "The Ghost Writer." Saramago's realism is braced with skepticism, so his skepticism feels real. Roth's narrative games emerge naturally from his consideration of ordinary human ironies and comedies; they do not start life as allegories about the relativity of mimesis, though they may become them. Saramago and Roth both assemble and dissemble their stories in ways that seem fundamentally grave. Auster, despite all the games, is the least ironic of contemporary writers. Read Adam Walker's profession of mortification in "Invisible":

> After torturing myself for close to a week, I finally found the courage to call my sister again, and when I heard myself spewing out the whole sordid business to Gwyn over the course of our two-hour conversation, I realized that I didn't have a choice. I had to step forward. If I didn't talk to the police, I would lose all respect for myself, and the shame of it would go on haunting me for the rest of my life.

A narrator who trades in such banalities is difficult to credit, and the writer who lends him those words seems uninterested in persuading us that they mean anything. But, once again, here is an Auster character keen to urge on us, in words of air, the gravity of his motives, the depths of his anguish: "This failure to act is far and away the most reprehensible thing I have ever done, the low point in my career as a human being." This shame supposedly determines the course of Walker's life. Later in the year, in Paris, he runs into Born again, and hatches a plan for revenge. Walker "has never been a vengeful person, has never actively sought to hurt anyone, but Born is in a different category, Born is a killer, Born deserves to be punished, and for the first time in his life Walker is out for blood."

You will notice that the novel's narration has switched from first person to third person—and that the novel's prose has not adjusted its awfulness. The switch in narration is less complex than it seems. An Austerian framing device is at work. Walker's account of how he met Born in 1967 (the first section of the novel) is revealed, in the novel's second section, to be a manuscript, which he has been working on as an adult, and which he has sent to his old Columbia friend James Freeman, now a well-known writer. Freeman is the only person in possession of this text, which recounts Walker's youthful adventures in New York and Paris, and which moves among first-, second-, and third-person narration. The second section of Walker's narrative contains a scandalous (and quite touching) account of an incestuous affair that Walker carried on with his sister, Gwyn, in the summer of 1967, just before he left for Paris. Auster's writing stirs in this passage about taboo-breaking, almost as if the radicalism of the content challenged something in his prose: the story has a vividness and pathos largely absent from the rest of the book.

Later in the novel, after the death of Adam Walker, James Freeman sends Walker's manuscript to Gwyn, who denies the incest. The reader is free to infer that Walker invented the relationship with his sister, in part as a way of compensating for the grief of his lost brother. Perhaps he also invented Born's murder of Cedric Williams, and for similar reasons. Unwisely, the novel ends by returning to its least plausible character, Rudolf Born, who is glimpsed, in the present day, now fat and old, and living on a Caribbean island, looked after by servants in expensive isolation, like Dr. No gone to seed. The vitality of the passage about Adam Walker's possible incest is squeezed at either end by the flamboyantly unreal Born.

The classic formulations of postmodernism, by philosophers and theorists like Maurice Blanchot and Ihab Hassan, emphasize the way that contemporary language abuts silence. For Blanchot, as indeed for Beckett, language is always announcing its invalidity. Texts stutter and fragment, shred themselves around a void. Perhaps the strangest element of Auster's reputation as an American postmodernist is that his language never registers this kind of absence at the level of the sentence. The void is all too speakable in Auster's work. The pleasing, slightly facile books come out almost every year, as tidy and punctual as postage stamps, and the applauding reviewers line up like eager stamp collectors to get the latest issue. Peter Aaron, the narrator of "Leviathan," whose prose is so pressureless, claims that "I have always been a plodder, a person who anguishes and struggles over each sentence, and even on my best days I do no more than inch along, crawling on my belly like a man lost in the desert. The smallest word is surrounded by acres of silence for me." Not enough silence, alas. ♦

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The Book Bench, our literary blog.

MUSICAL EVENTS

COMEBACKS

City Opera recovers; the Met has a triumph.

BY ALEX ROSS

At the opening-night gala for New York City Opera, earlier this month, the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato bestowed her glowing tone on Leonard Bernstein's song "Take Care of This House." Given the dire problems that City Opera has lately faced—a disappearing general manager, a vanishing endowment, layoffs, labor disputes, dissent on the governing board, bad press, and, above all, the cancellation of almost an entire season—Alan Jay Lerner's lyrics fit the occasion uncomfortably well:

> Here in this shell of a house,
> This house that is struggling to be,
> Hope must have been
> The first to move in,
> And waited to welcome me.
> But hope isn't easy to see.

Back in early 2007, the days of endless money, City Opera announced that the modish Belgian impresario Gerard Mortier would take over as general manager and artistic director. Less than two years later, Mortier withdrew, citing a shortage of funds. When City Opera then handed the job to George Steel—an experienced presenter of new-music concerts but an opera neophyte—many people wondered whether the company would survive. With Peter Gelb taking the Metropolitan Opera in a more progressive direction, did Lincoln Center still need an alternative opera house? News stories described City Opera as "troubled," "beleaguered," even "tottering." One online reporter cheerfully predicted oblivion.

In a feat of sang-froid, Steel ignored the doomsaying and put together a semblance of a season—two productions in the fall and three in the spring. The gala made for a bumpy start, with the orchestra sounding scrappy at the outset and several singers struggling to be heard. But the program, consisting of American and Canadian singers performing American music, reaffirmed City Opera's commitment to native artists. Vocal honors went to DiDonato, who is at the zenith of her art, and Measha Brueggergosman, who gave a smoldering "My Man's Gone Now," from "Porgy and Bess." Rufus Wainwright, the pop stylist turned opera composer, mugged his way through "That's Entertainment" and then repaired to the audience to hear Amy Burton sing the closing aria of his opera "Prima Donna"—an intriguingly wispy exercise in French Romantic style.

The gala also marked the début of the David H. Koch Theatre, as the New York State Theatre is now named. An interior renovation, made possible by Koch's oil-and-gas fortune, has produced a brighter acoustic, although the sound still lacks warmth. The improvement is substantial enough that City Opera has nixed its sound-enhancement system, which never seemed to do much anyway. Thankfully, aisles now divide the orchestra seating, meaning that patrons in the center no longer need to say "Excuse me" twenty times.

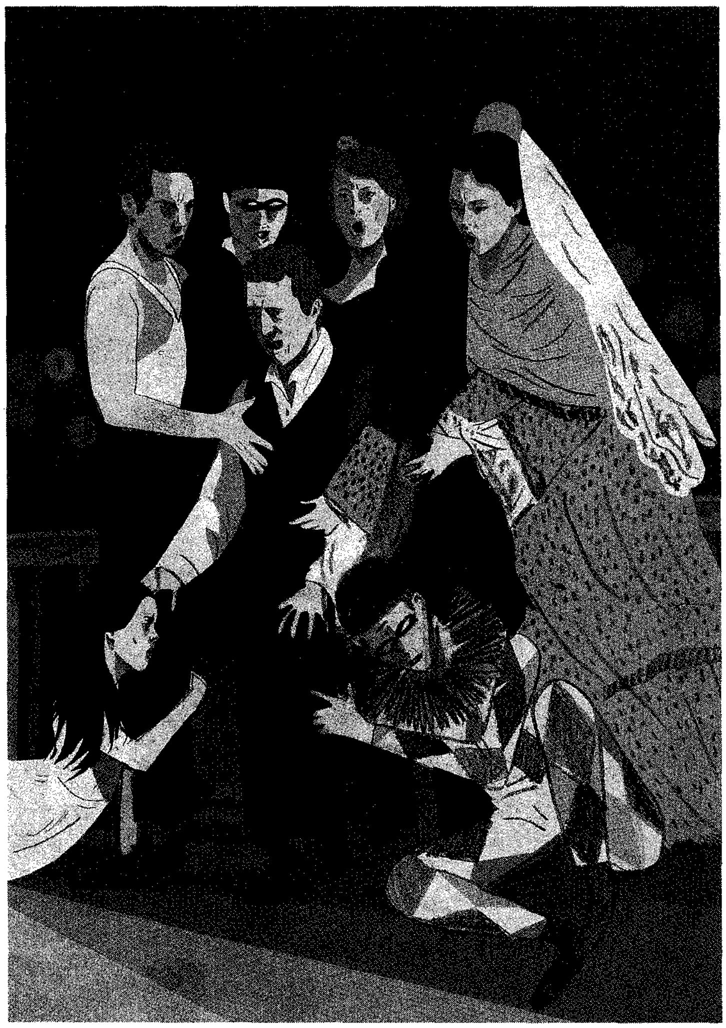
Two nights later, City Opera revived Hugo Weisgall's "Esther," an adaptation of the Biblical tale of Queen Esther. The work had its première at City Opera, in 1993, and then dropped from sight. Weisgall, who died in 1997, was an unfailingly craftsmanlike composer who adopted a largely atonal idiom, in the vein of Arnold Schoenberg. "Moses und Aron," Schoenberg's prophetic drama, is the chief model for "Esther," although Weisgall's harmonic language comes closer to that of Berg's "Lulu." It's a rugged, earnest opera, strongest in choruses of lament and rage. But it lacks either the overpowering personality of "Moses" or the vast expressive range of "Lulu"; it takes you back to the time when Schoenberg's imitators tried to normalize atonality, suppressing its uncanny power.

Nonetheless, Steel showed mettle in retrieving this estimable obscurity from the warehouse; it was hardly the safe way to begin his tenure. And the production came off handsomely. Christopher Mattaliano's 1993 staging, a sleek affair that relies on projections rather than hulking sets, has aged well. Lauren Flanigan, who has given so many gutsy performances at the house, vitally inhabited the title character, capturing Esther's transformation from naïve maiden to vengeful orator. The tenor Roy Cornelius Smith, as Haman, demonstrated how a strong voice can take command of the theatre's new acoustics. George Manahan conducted incisively.

The other offering in City Opera's truncated fall season is a funny, sexy, spooky new production of "Don Giovanni," by Christopher Alden. A provocateur with sharp theatrical instincts, Alden has placed the opera in a surreal nineteen-thirties Spanish setting, vaguely evocative of Buñuel films. There are jarring outbursts of violence—Don Giovanni kills the Commendatore by dashing his head against a wall—and some marvellously creepy party scenes, with dancers writhing in slow motion. We gradually realize that the drab public space in which the action unfolds is a funeral parlor, and that the Don will have to confront not the Commendatore's statue but his corpse. The damnation climax is chilling: the Commendatore rises from his coffin and invites the Don to take his place.

A young cast eagerly realized Alden's vision. Daniel Okulitch fluidly delivered the title role, even if his tone needed a little more red meat. Jason Hardy sang and acted vigorously as Leporello, the Don's masochistic servant; he also juggled and balanced a chair on his chin. Stefania Dovhan revealed a hint of star quality as Donna Anna, her voice dark in timbre and expressively pointed; Keri Alkema was an erratic but vivid Donna Elvira. Gary Thor Wedow led a propulsive, though sometimes overhasty, performance, with Liora Maurer adding witty adornments at the harpsichord. It bodes well for the new regime that Steel and his staff whipped up this captivating show in a matter of months. By the end of City Opera's opening weekend, hope was a little easier to see.

Peter Gelb, too, is facing a test: the current Met season is the first that he has planned himself, and it will allow for a thorough assessment of his progress as general manager. The first new production of the fall, "Tosca," was troublingly inept. The second, Leoš Janáček's "From the House of the Dead," is a total triumph, perhaps one of the finest things that the Met has ever done. Admittedly, it is an import of an already celebrated staging, by the French director Patrice Chéreau, who has been a legend in European opera since his epochal production of Wagner's "Ring" at Bayreuth, in 1976. Gelb deserves credit, however, for insuring that Chéreau's vision reached the Met intact; the company's semi-feudalistic culture has stymied directors many times in the past. If anything, the Met version is more fiercely integrated than what you see on a DVD filmed two years ago at Aix-en-Provence.



A funny, sexy, and spooky production of "Don Giovanni," at City Opera.

RACHEL DOMM

"From the House of the Dead," based on Dostoyevsky's autobiographical novel of Siberian prison life, is Janáček's grimmest and possibly greatest opera. The Moravian master wrote it at the end of his life, in 1927 and 1928, when he had broken free of all convention and essentially invented his own form of music theatre. The libretto is a swirling collage of dialogue from the Dostoyevsky novel, with no clearly defined leads. In each act, a prisoner narrates his crime, generating little sympathy in the process. The commandant orders beatings; the prisoners beat each other. Not even Berg drew so pitiless a picture of the human condition. Yet the fury of Janáček's invention justifies the quotation from Dostoyevsky that the composer wrote at the head of the score: "In every creature a spark of God."

Chéreau has discarded both operatic routine and modern directorial clichés. In some ways, his conception is grittily realistic: the convicts, with their unshaven faces, tattered coats, and agitated body language, are a seething bunch, a hive of tension. In other ways, the setting is enigmatic and abstract: no obvious cues are given for time or place, and the action is contained within blank concrete walls. Some of the imagery recalls Andrei Tarkovsky's "Stalker," the most forbidding film to emerge from the Soviet Union. (The sets are by Richard Peduzzi, whose grim aesthetic works far better here than it did in the ill-fated "Tosca.") In an awesome coup de théâtre, the walls are revealed at one point to be a gigantic garbage chute, the prisoners' job being to gather refuse. The main spark of hope comes in Act II, when the inmates present a pair of entertainments, one of them an all-male "Don Juan." Here the staging becomes more than a commentary on Siberian deprivation. The camp is a community of people haunted by their mistakes, and the makeshift theatre allows them the grace of forgetting.

The cast is flawless. Kurt Streit found plaintive lyricism in Skuratov, an unstable romantic who killed his sweetheart's husband. The liquid-voiced Swedish baritone Peter Mattei drew disturbing pathos from Shishkov, a tortured lout who cut his wife's throat when she declared her love for another. And Stefan Margita created an effectively grating portrait of Filka Morozov, a pathological scoundrel who might be the worst of the lot. Singers in smaller roles had no less impact: Willard White, nobly traumatized as the political detainee Gorianchikov; Vladimir Ognovenko, brutally cavalier as the commandant; the venerable character tenor Heinz Zednik (Loge and Mime in Chéreau's "Ring"), dispensing shards of wisdom as the Old Prisoner. Members of the chorus added more subtle shades of emotion, and unleashed a potent roar at the end: "Freedom, dear freedom!" they sang, against rattling drums.

Esa-Pekka Salonen was the conductor, making a belated Met début—though not as belated as the début of Chéreau, who had never before worked at an American opera house. Salonen proved a worthy replacement for Pierre Boulez, Chéreau's longtime collaborator, who led the European performances of this production. Indeed, Salonen may have dug deeper into Janáček's musical language, which is more minimalist than modernist in its obsessive manipulation of folkish motifs. The cruelly exposed orchestral writing came off with uncommon precision—the Met brass had an especially brilliant outing—and the players responded to Salonen's direction with startling vehemence. From the crackling first bars of the prelude, you knew that this would be no ordinary night at the opera. A hundred minutes later, the last harsh chord sounded, a stunned audience burst into a prolonged ovation, and it seemed as though the grand old Met had been the scene of a revolution. ♦

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Unquiet Thoughts, Alex Ross's new blog.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

WILD NIGHTS

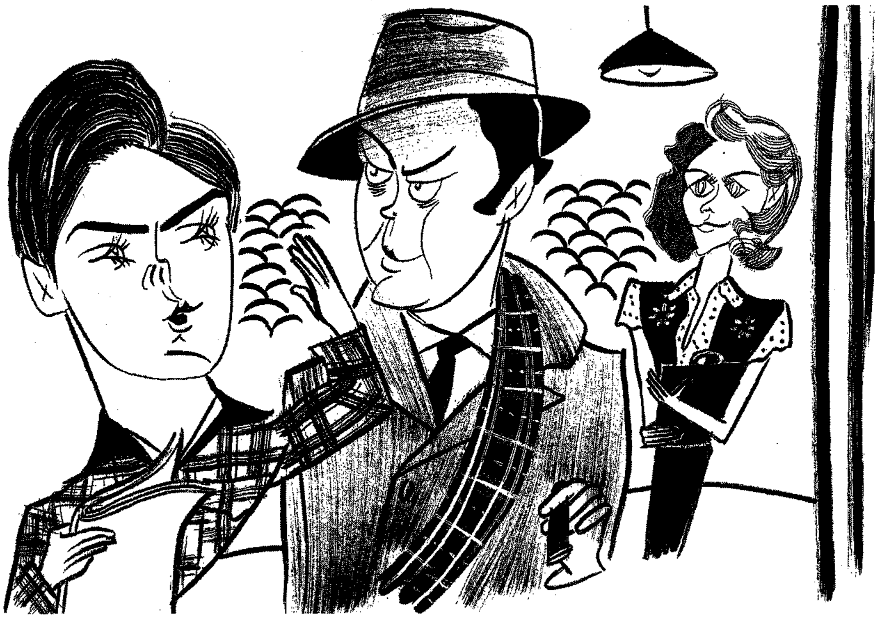
"Me and Orson Welles" and "Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans."

BY DAVID DENBY

The lips are wrong. Well, at any rate, they're different: thin and pursed rather than fleshy and cherubic. But Christian McKay, the thirty-six-year-old British actor who plays the young Orson Welles in "Me and Orson Welles," has the necessary stature and the vaunting authority for the job. McKay has an easy way with a cigar, too, and a small, sly smile and a strong voice. Not *that* voice, with its sonic-boom impact, but a fine, leathery instrument. "I am Orson Welles!" he thunders, when challenged. "I own the store." The year is 1937, when the great man is twenty-two. The newly formed Mercury Theatre, under the joint direction of Welles and John Houseman (Eddie Marsan), is mounting its first production in New York—a heavily cut and rearranged version of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," with the characters dressed in the uniforms and long coats of the Italian Fascists. We see Welles through the eyes of a cocky seventeen-year-old, Richard Samuels (Zac Efron), a New Jersey kid who bluffs his way into the company. Richard Linklater, the director, and Holly Gent Palmo and Vince Palmo, the screenwriters (who adapted Robert Kaplow's 2003 novel of the same title), create a bond between the boy and the theatre big shot. Welles recognizes Samuels as a fellow-mover, and, for a frantic week, as the production lurches toward opening night, the two of them take each other's measure. It's a drastically unequal contest. Welles plays Brutus in the production, but his will is closer to Caesar's. He seduces and bullies everyone, drops actors from the script at will, exercises droit du seigneur over the women in the company, and, in general, acts as if he were God incarnate, which, for all practical purposes, he is. The actors and the craftsmen admire him, loathe him, and know that they couldn't have theatrical careers of comparable magnitude without him—all New York awaits the opening.

The plot, unfortunately, is conventionally conceived: Richard gets initiated into sex and other fascinating and complicated rites of the grownup world; that is, he gets warmed and then burned by people more experienced and ruthless than anyone could be at seventeen. We've seen this rueful coming-of-age story before. And we've seen other movies about the staging of a famous production. But if "Me and Orson Welles" isn't as witty as "Shakespeare in Love," which, after all, had a script shined up by Tom Stoppard, it's much better than "Cradle Will Rock," Tim Robbins's 1999 account of another legendary early Welles project, a movie with too many characters and too narrow a view (i.e., orthodox left) of the relation of money and art. The strength of "Me and Orson Welles" is that it sticks to Welles's actual production and to the life of a new theatre company. This is a movie of great spirit and considerable charm. It's about the giddiness of promise—the awakening of young talent, after years of the Depression, to a moment when anything seems possible.

Working with a limited budget, Linklater found a vintage theatre on the Isle of Man which doubles for the Mercury, on West Forty-first Street (formerly the Comedy, and now long gone); he and his crew reconstructed nineteen-thirties-style New York exteriors at Pinewood Studios, outside London, and assembled a decent cast to support McKay. As Samuels, Zac Efron, the dancing teen heartthrob and shirtless Internet sensation, is surprisingly winning. Efron draws on his confident good looks (from certain angles, this Jewish hoofer from California looks like, of all people, Tyrone Power) without being smug. He's an actor, after all—maybe even a genuine star. And the even better-looking Claire Danes, of the foot-wide smile, achieves something difficult as Welles's secretary, Sonja Jones, a friendly and likable woman whose ambition is nevertheless so ravenous that she can't be trusted for a second. There are many minor characters, swiftly and easily drawn. Linklater, the director of "Slackers," "School of Rock," and many other movies, usually works with pop culture; this is his first foray into the classics. Quippy, fast, and enjoyably corny, "Welles" is like a musical comedy without songs. The music is mostly swing hits from the period, along with Marc Blitzstein's martial drums-and-brass score for the original production, which is played (with the musicians missing many cues) throughout the film.



Zac Efron, Christian McKay, and Claire Danes in Richard Linklater's new movie.

TOM BACHTELL

As opening night nears, Richard's adventures are of secondary interest, and we welcome with relish the movie's returning again and again to Welles. He carries on like a much older man—Henry Irving, for example, or some other flamboyant, groundbreaking actor-manager of the nineteenth century, who raised money, edited texts, designed sets, starred in many of the productions, and kept the company going. But Welles has a modernist temperament and a subversive love of shock. He's abrasive, treacherous, boastful, and inconstant, blocking and reblocking the show at the last minute. At first, this bombast, no matter how amusing, feels too broadly vociferous. Then it becomes clear that Linklater and McKay are portraying Welles as a man who's consciously entertaining and stimulating his company, playing the black-hearted son of a bitch, creating a crisis atmosphere so that he can pull everything together at the last minute and save the day. What reconciles us to him, and also compels the actors, including Joseph Cotten (James Tupper) and George Coulouris (Ben Chaplin), to stay with him, is his theatrical intelligence. Welles directs as he acts, moving people around between lines, getting them to lower or raise their voices or shape a phrase in a different way. He's like a conductor who points out mistakes while pushing the music forward. And when opening night finally arrives, and we get to see chunks of the production, the old radical theatre ideas still have power. The stage is bare, the back wall a rust red, the violence frightening, and the audience stunned. For moviegoers, however, the triumph is bittersweet. A theatrical performance can be altered and revised until just before the curtain rises, but a movie, with its thousands of interlocking details, requires long-range planning, consistency, and reliability. In Welles's rabbit-out-of-the-hat victory of 1937, one sees the habits that will lead not only to a few peerless films but also to many defeats and tragically abandoned projects.

Snakes, in their sinister side-to-side way, slither through floodwaters, menacing a man held in an underground jail; alligators climb onto a freeway, causing cars to smash into one another; iguanas lounge on coffee tables, turning their yellow-green eyes on the humans around them. In brief, Werner Herzog has checked into New Orleans, and metaphysical despair has been loosed upon Bourbon Street. "Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans" is set during the months after Katrina. A local drug kingpin is killing African-born interlopers in the white-powder trade; Detective Terence McDonagh (Nicolas Cage) tries to stop him, sort of, while grabbing as much cocaine as he can for himself. The movie is an approximate remake of the notorious Abel Ferrara film of 1992, in which Harvey Keitel bullied, thieved, snorted, and fornicated his way to immortality as a crooked and sometimes naked New York cop. Herzog, in his ineffably high-minded manner, has bristled at the "theoreticians of cinema" who would compare his picture with the earlier one, which he says he has not seen. ("Go for it, losers," he tells them.) I am not a theoretician, but, as a mere vulgar critic, I have to report that Ferrara's work was a highly sexual affair, with a real sense of pleasure in violation—a movie immersed in sub-Scorsesean despair, guilt, self-indulgence, and redemption. Herzog's film, by contrast, is both an intermittent police procedural and an outrageously diverting celebration of crack mania.

The character Keitel played may have been falling apart, but as an actor he remained a solid chunk of God's earth, entirely grounded; Nicolas Cage is pixillated. At the beginning of the movie, the Lieutenant injures his back while saving the snake-menaced jailbird. The back never heals, and McDonagh stomps through the city with one shoulder held higher than the other, his brow furrowed, his lips curled in anguish. He looks like Quasimodo without a bell rope to hang on to. Herzog sends this literally cracked detective into dangerous houses and down darkened streets, gun drawn, like any other cop pursuing leads. But the next minute McDonagh will have a hallucination—he sees a dead body break-dancing—or explode into hysterics, his face violently wrenched into an enormous grin. Herzog, who seems to be drawing on the audience's affection for him as an inspired madman, may not care to tell a story straight anymore. The poetic possibilities of drug addiction have both liberated and overwhelmed him. The movie is a mess, but it's certainly not dull. At the end, McDonagh asks, "Do fishes dream?" That's the kind of question Herzog finds interesting, and it inspires many questions of comparable fascination: Do clouds have an unconscious? Do pinball machines steal the souls of the drunken truck drivers who pull their levers? Conundrums, like wandering lizards, pile up at the gates of the cinema. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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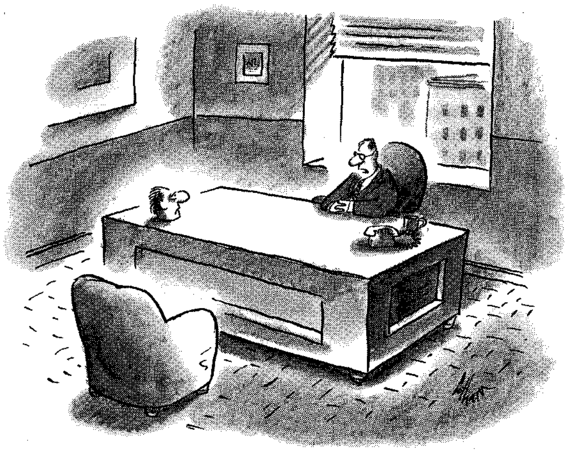
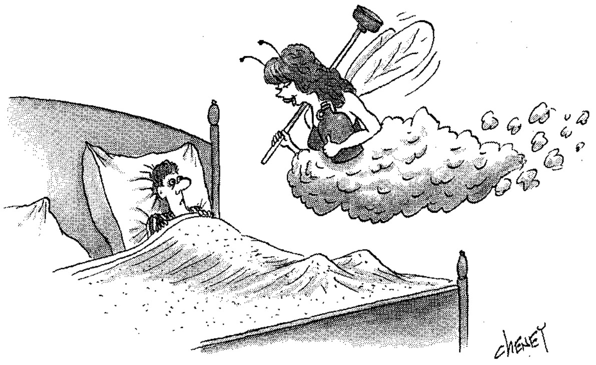
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, November 29th. The finalists in the November 16th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 14th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'm afraid we need to make more cuts."
David Kessler, New York City



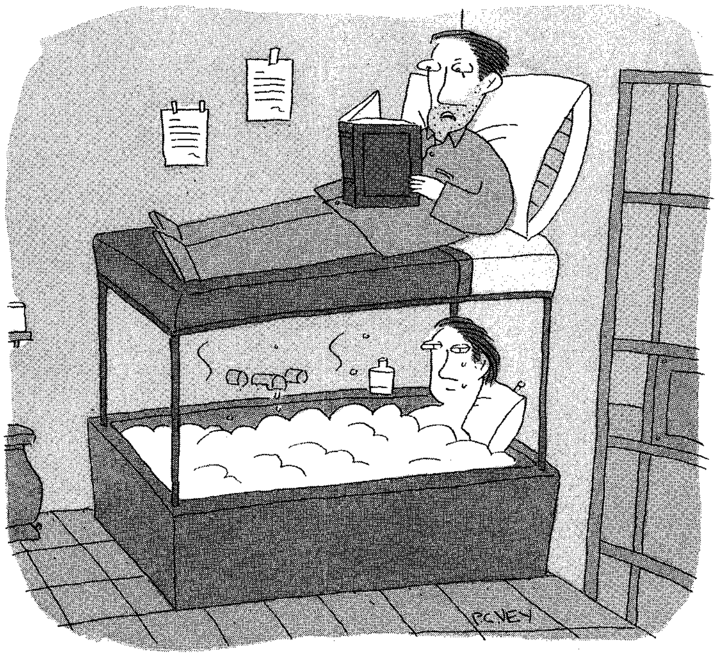
THE FINALISTS

"In this economy, it's good to have an extra trade."
Deborah Begel, La Madera, N.M.

"I'm your fairy god plumber."
Lawrence Lytton, New York City

*"I'm here to grant your wife's wish
that you would fix the toilet."*
Geoff Stamper, Bellevue, Wash.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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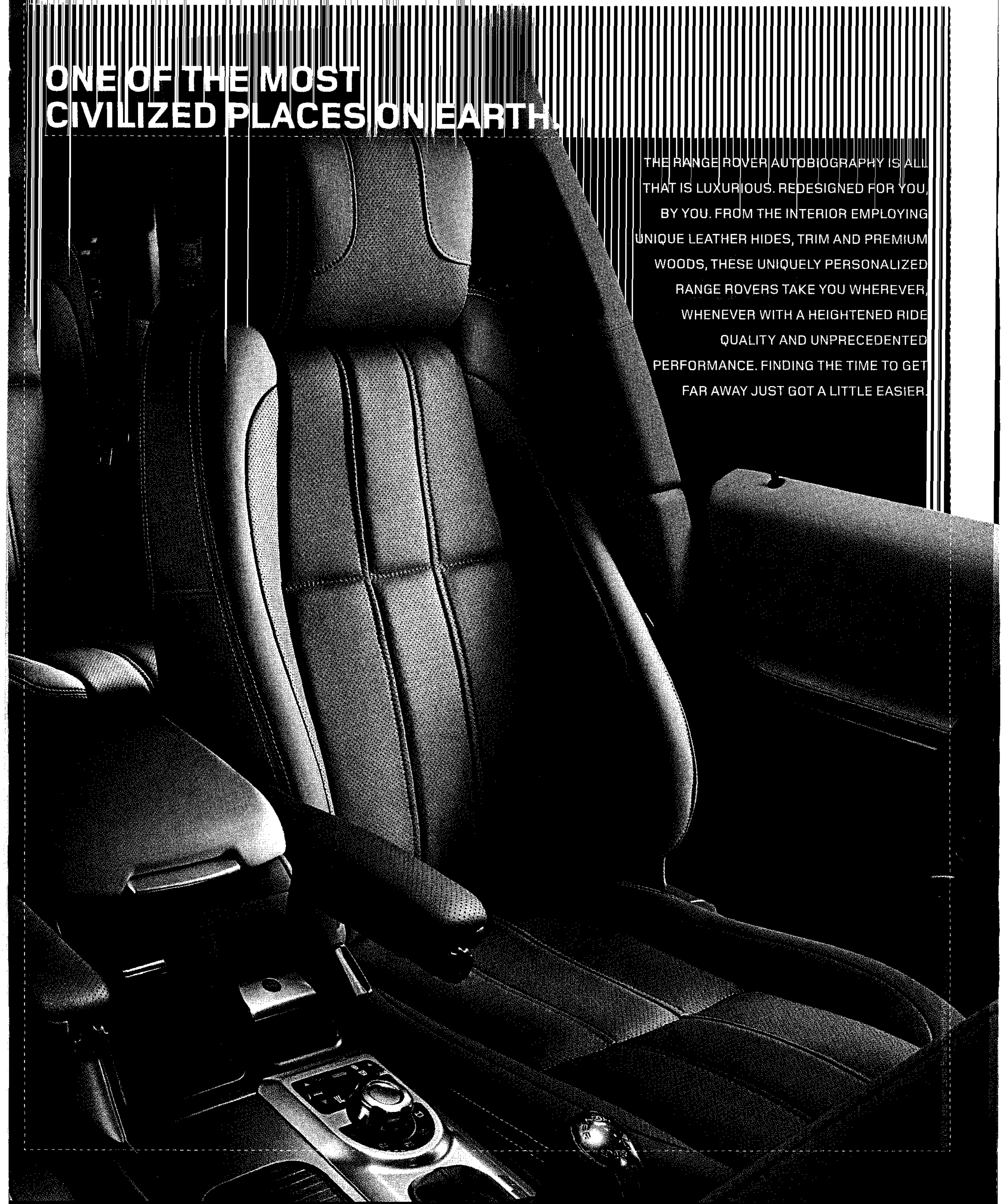

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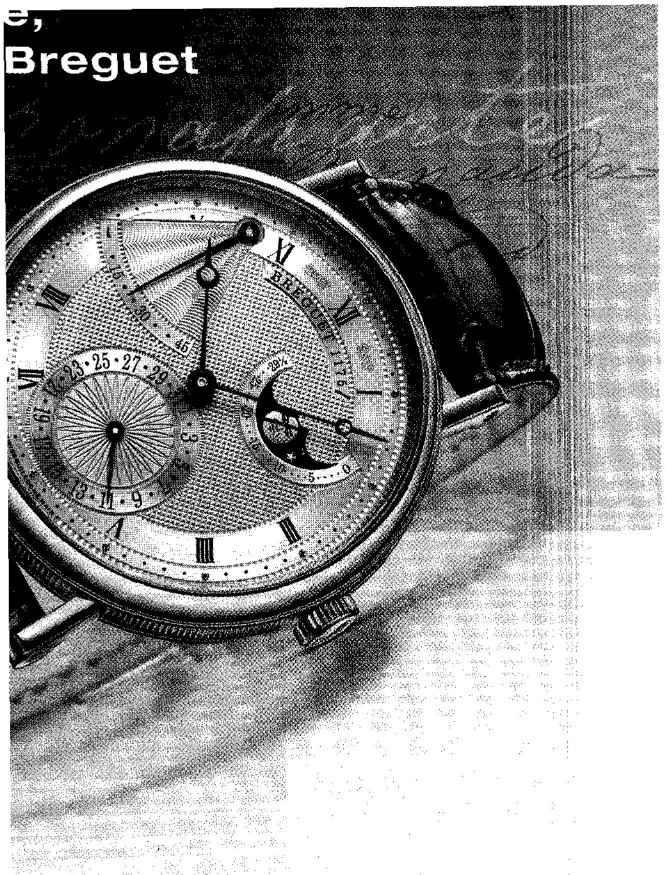

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